University of Alberta

A Narrative Inquiry of a Male Elementary Teacher and the Shaping of his Identities

by

Garry Jones ©

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled A NARRATIVE INQUIRY OF A MALE ELEMENTARY TEACHER AND THE SHAPING OF HIS IDENTITIES submitted by GARRY JONES in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

This document tells the story of my personal journey. In 1998, after more than twenty years teaching elementary school, I went on sabbatical leave to begin a Ph.D. at the University of Alberta. While the phrase "male elementary teacher" in the title refers to Peter Thompson, the grade one teacher who is part of this research project, it also refers to me. While I carried out this research in his classroom over the course of a year, I continually reflected back on my own experiences as a teacher of young children. While thinking about the shaping of Peter's identities, I wrote about my own evolving identities.

This is a narrative inquiry based on the work of Clandinin and Connelly (1986, 1988, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2000). Peter Thompson welcomed me into his classroom during the 1999-2000 school year. I listened to stories told about him by parents, other staff members, and students. I tape recorded these conversations. Peter listened to the tapes, and we met weekly for conversations, which I tape recorded.

As people talked about Peter, I heard three strong stories which are described in detail: "Our Men are Different", "This School is a Sacred place" and "The Reluctant Superhero". After describing these strong stories, I tell two specific classroom stories: "Mandy's Wet Underpants" and "Valentine's Cards Carry So Many Messages". By placing these stories side by side, like a collage, I discuss ways in which Peter's identities are being shaped.

Acknowledgements

Research as collage is the metaphor capturing the spirit of the narratives set forth here. I would like to create a collage of acknowledgements, with the people, places, conversations, readings and stories pasted on the page. However, because of restrictions of time and space, I will write these out in this letter.

Jean:

Everyone knows how much I appreciate your constant support, encouragement and guidance during the past three years. Quite simply, I loved my time with you at "The Centre." I need to say no more.

Doug and Margaret (the supervisory committee):

I will always remember how much I enjoyed sitting in your classes, and being a student after so many years as a teacher. Our conversations prodded my thinking and you supported my work. I can now admit I am totally afraid of both of you, because you are both so knowledgeable, so brilliant, so literate, such good teachers, and …well … so SMART. But in the end you were both so helpful. My advice to other graduate students is to get committee members who scare you.

Joe, Lynn, Sandra:

A special thank you for your careful readings of this text and your insightful responses. This whole process could not happen without your dedication. You demonstrate that our public educators are totally committed to teaching and learning. Sandra, I love your books.

"Peter" and the research school:

It goes without saying that this would not be possible without you. You warmly welcomed me into your school, and gave me all the hours I wanted for this research. I was always amazed at the work you do at this school. It is truly special. Peter, you and I had a great time! Thanks.

Special Edmonton friends:

I will not name you or I will hurt someone's feelings. But all my Edmonton friends, you made my time there so fabulous. I LOVED all the conversations over at the coffee shop, the dinners with red wine, the sharing of the journals and articles, the laughter, the playing with ideas that occurred everywhere I went, the quiet conversations in offices, the walks in the park, the poems, photographs, and cookies. I even enjoyed my weekly bus ride! And of course, there's the famous table at the amazing Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development. Those conversations and friends will always be with me.

I must acknowledge the financial support of the University of Alberta's Ph.D. Scholarship, and the school system that provided my sabbatical.

Finally, to my family, Barbara, Owen, Sean and Evan:

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Part One: Preparing the Studio

1. Looking back: collecting the artifacts and their stories

September 1998: I began a new story

Each Sunday I boarded the bus for Edmonton carrying my backpack stuffed with two shirts, three lunches, a binder, pens, my journals, a couple of textbooks, a tape recorder. The three hour ride was my time for transition from one world to another, from my Calgary world to my Edmonton world. I dwell in a life including Barbara, Evan, Owen, and Sean, our garden, our kitchen table, our walks in the park, our Saturday shopping and the thousands of days living with children in classrooms. In my Calgary life I am a teacher, a father, a husband, a gardener, a reader and a writer. I have various identities and I live many plotlines. I left them all behind. I felt separated from my own life with its relentless and continuous movement through time.

While riding the bus I read. I listened to the tapes of my weekly meetings with Jean Clandinin, my supervisor. Writing was impossible due to the inconsistent vibrations on the bus. Sometimes I simply looked out the window.

I stepped off the bus in Edmonton into another world, like Alice arriving in Wonderland, Dorothy landing in Oz, or Bilbo finding himself in the company of dwarves. I am not claiming this was a magical world, but rather I am stating that it felt totally different. I was torn out of my ordinary everyday existence and I arrived someplace else. However, while I physically left the Calgary world behind, I brought artifacts in my backpack. I have collected a life time of artifacts in boxes and drawers at home: cards from children and parents, photographs, student work, gifts and my journals. These

artifacts connect to countless stories, and these stories from my life constitute my work. I began to think about my doctoral research about men who teach elementary school.

When I arrived in September I felt much like a grade one child going to school for the first time. As is my habit, I wrote in my journal.

September 9, 1998

I am sitting in my office at 6 PM writing. Out the window the evening sun is shining across campus. I am starting to feel that this is my new "home", my private space.

I feel strange because there are so many firsts and today my head is full to the top. The firsts: setting up an office, becoming part of a university, sleeping in a new room, being a full time Ph.D. student, staying away from home for an extended time, taking the bus to another city. Even getting a key was a trying task.

This reminds me of teaching grade one students. On the first day of school they get so mixed up because they don't know how school works. Every year at least one child goes home at recess because she thinks school is over. Another gets lost at recess. Those who brought lunch forget where they put it. Of the children who go home, someone does not return after lunch. They confuse indoor and outdoor shoes, refuse to part with their notices from home, do not want to leave those new crayons in the desk and someone always cries when it is time to go home. That night at home they are exhausted.

Today I feel like I am in grade one. But I won't cry when I go home.

Like many grade one students, I felt mixed up and exhilarated at the same time. Grade one students, bundles of anticipation, arrive at the school room door in September expecting to learn to read and write. I arrived at the door of the university with similar expectations. However, instead of instantly learning to read, we spend the first days in confusion, frustration and chaos. Then the routines become established and days become predictable. The learning takes time.

The routines and predictability of my life were broken when I did not return to an elementary school late in August. I had anticipated this moment for many years - while taking Masters courses on a part time basis I first considered engaging in doctoral

studies. As I set up my office on the first day I thought about other first days as a teacher of young children. As I wrote about the grade one children I thought about my identity as an elementary teacher.

As a young person I loved teaching and wanted to be nowhere else but in a classroom. Behind the door of my classroom I experienced all the struggles and joys of living with a group of learners in a small room for a ten month period. However, beginning in my first year I heard comments from those I met outside the classroom - parents, teachers, administrators, librarians, secretaries and caretakers - about my presence in the school building as a man. I heard that I was a good role model for boys, and that more men should teach in the elementary school. I quietly agreed with the comments, and concentrated on becoming a good teacher.

After twenty-two years of classroom teaching, including a period of time as a vice-principal, I began to wonder about these comments. I described myself as a creative teacher, an effective writing teacher, a teacher-researcher, a musician, and a writer, yet others consistently labeled me a *male* teacher. After hearing the same words for twenty-two years I began to wonder "what does this mean?" Why do others continue to see my maleness as important? Who am I as a teacher? And who am I as a *male* teacher? Even though I always felt supported and valued, I began to feel increasingly uneasy about my position in schools, *as a man*. It is this undefined uneasiness that brought me to Edmonton.

I applied for a sabbatical from my school district, which was granted for September 1998. By setting up my office in Edmonton I created a space for my work, a

different kind of classroom, a personal classroom. Like the children, I claimed a desk and placed my pencils in the drawer. My head seemed to be full to the top as I prepared myself to become a student.

I wrote this entry in a "Hilroy exercise book", a book recognized by students and teachers everywhere as a school "scribbler." I have been writing journal entries such as this since September 1986. The cover of each exercise book is labeled with the beginning and ending date of the journal and the school in which I taught at the time. Inside, my journals contain snapshots, stories, newspaper articles, cards, letters, conference brochures, and of course, my reflections.

I write. I have been writing since childhood when I wrote a family newspaper and scripted puppet plays. I wrote poems, songs and stories in high school and as a young adult co-wrote and recorded a children's musical (Jones and Wong, 1979, 1999). I wrote about classroom experiences and eventually published two books of stories about life in the classroom (Jones, 1991, 1997). As the events in my life unfold, such as entering graduate school, I write.

I do not choose to write, but rather I am compelled to write. I collect the artifacts of my life. I write about the artifacts and by writing I figure out my life. I write to understand. I write to know. Like riding the bus to Edmonton, writing IS my journey, and I am "composing my life" (Bateson, 1989).

My boxes of artifacts guide me. As I set about writing this document I returned to my own artifacts. I brought the dusty cardboard boxes out of the closet and set them on the dining room table. I took out photographs, binders of poetry, notes from publishing

projects, the journals. I sank into a chair by the light of the window and selected the first artifact.

The puppets: childhood plotlines

I take out two string marionettes I received one Christmas from my parents. As I look at them I recall the puppet shows created with my younger brother. I feel the tug of time as I think back to my childhood home almost 40 years ago.

I grew up in the fifties and sixties in a suburban home surrounded by a white fence. The other houses in my neighborhood were also filled with children and

surrounded by fences and there was no shortage of friends and acquaintances. We felt safe playing outside and walking to school and church. Most of my school chums attended the same United Church with its choirs, cubs, scouts and other youth groups.

In the summer we played neighborhood games of Kick the Can, Mother May I, Hide and Seek, and many other games that required no skills and few rules. We walked to the swimming pool, or played in The Park with its swings, slide, sand box and monkey bars. Our family camped in the Kananaskiis and the Okanagan valley. In winter we skated all day Saturday and Sunday after church, built igloos (there was always more snow back then) and went tobogganing. My sisters read to me when I was very young until I could read myself.

I read constantly. I recall reading in the living room on rainy afternoons, devouring books from cover to cover. I read everything from Tom Sawyer and Canadian history to the Saturday comics and books about puppets or magic tricks. On hot summer

afternoons, I rode my bike to the Crescent Heights Public library with my older brother and sisters to sign out books. When we returned home we stretched out on the shady grass in the backyard to read.

My parents worked hard to maintain this family home. They valued education, the church and youth groups such as Boy Scouts. My dad is one of those people who could do anything. When I was young he built furniture, repaired engines, painted with oils, sang in the choir, played violin, organized church and school committees, even cut our hair! He was driven to achieve and at the age of eighty still keeps busy with household tasks. My mom, equally talented, participated in church groups, sang in several choirs, and cared for the needs of a husband and five children. We learned that our responsibilities come first. We can work first, then play later. All of us continue to enjoy gardening, hiking and camping.

My younger brother was born during the year I attended kindergarten. The older siblings engaged themselves in "grown-up" activities like homework, lessons and clubs so the two of us spent countless hours together. We created a fort by hanging a blanket down the edge of the bed to the floor and crawling under. We bounced a ball up and down the stairs, creating rules that changed as the game progressed until our noise interfered with others. On Saturday afternoons we played "pioneers going west" by placing a blanket covered box in a wagon, filling it with teddy bears, toy guns, and tin can cooking pots, then pulling it around the yard. To this day I can see us hiding Easter eggs for our parents, reading the Saturday comics stretched out on the living room floor, looking for UFOs in the park and camping out in the backyard.

Inspired by Walt Disney and the Ed Sullivan Show we produced puppet shows for the family. We built a theatre out of a cardboard box, painted sets, designed lighting with a desk lamp and extension cord. We wrote our own plays and made puppets for characters. Tickets were sold. On opening night, my brother took tickets at the door and guided people to their seats using a flashlight. When all were seated, the show began.

One year I received the two beautiful string marionettes for Christmas gifts, which required different staging and puppetry techniques. However, my interest in theatre faded in junior high school. I did not share this enthusiasm with friends and the time came when I could no longer force family members to watch. I don't remember exactly when these adventures ended. I did not call myself a puppeteer. It was just a game I played, something I did for fun.

While I turned away from puppetry, the creative drive continued as an energizing force in my life.

Poetry books: a plotline of writing

I place the puppets on the table and turn to the binders filled with poetry.

I enjoyed a great deal of music in my childhood. My parents hosted annual musical evenings at home. I sang in two choirs and played piano. Consequently it is no surprise that music opened the door to my writing.

As a young teenager I abandoned the piano lessons and took up the guitar. Inspired by the folk singers of the day, such as Simon and Garfunkel, Bob Dylan and Gordon Lightfoot, I wrote my own songs. In high school Bill Woodward, Chris Garcia and I formed a folk singing trio. Bill and I wrote several songs which we performed along with the standards of the day. We performed my song "Jenny Lou" in the Kiwanis

Festival. I connected to poetry through the folk songs of the sixties. Because I was writing

songs the grade eleven literature course engaged me and influenced my writing. I wrote page after page of poetry, short stories and plays which will never see the light of public display. I attempted to resolve my questions and feelings. By writing I brought order to the confusion. In 1971 I wrote about this:

> My poetry is poetry of the search. All humans search for meaning of life and death - we try to make sense of these opposites and thus make sense out of life. These poems are about my search, my questions and where I am searching for the answers. (personal poetry book, 1971)

I did not call myself as a poet or songwriter. I felt uncomfortable with these labels. I played with writing.

Sitting in those grade eleven literature classes, I decided to become a teacher. I imagined myself sharing my insights about Shakespeare, the Romantic poets and modern writers with the next generation of high school students. I applied to attend the university.

<u>In the Children's Garden: a plotline of "kindergarten teacher"</u>

I looked once more at the picture of our high school singing group and set it aside with the poetry books. I turned to my article from the Calgary Herald.

In 1971 I entered the Faculty of Education assuming that I would teach high school English. However, a single event changed my life direction. My mother worked for a few weeks in the day care center housed in the basement of our church. One day she asked me to bring the guitar and entertain the children. At that time I knew only "adult"

songs and had no idea what to play, but I went and enjoyed myself. As a result, Mrs. Clark, the Director, asked if I would like to work during the summer vacation, providing holidays for full time staff. I remember thinking, 'well, I won't like it, but it's a job'.

Much to my surprise, I liked it! I enjoyed the children. It was fun to read stories, sing, play in the water table, go to the playground AND get paid. I got hooked on the children. I talked to my mom for hours about particular children and their situations. Mrs. Clark offered me shifts during the following two years and I worked during university breaks. She distributed child development articles and sent me to workshops or conferences.

In the early seventies The Minister of Education of the Government of Alberta announced the new Early Childhood Services program and suddenly it seemed like the times caught up to me. I transferred into elementary education, specializing in Early Childhood Education. I completed my program and applied for a position teaching kindergarten, or ECS as it became known in Alberta.

In October, 1978, The Calgary Herald published an article about me on the front page (Spearman, 1978, A1). As a beginning teacher I did not expect the local newspaper to write a story about me. When it did, the story paid attention to my maleness. I loved the attention.

I remember myself as an enthusiastic young man with a guitar who thought that the world was changing. The women's movement, the civil rights movement and the

trends of the sixties influenced my decision to teach, believing that I could "give something" to society. Being singled out as special was a perk.

At about the same time, Doug Wong and I wrote a children's musical entitled "Wanda the Littlest Wizard" (Jones G., and Wong D., 1979, 1999). Each evening in August 1978, Doug arrived with his electric typewriter under his arm and we worked at my dining room table until early morning, occasionally taking a break at the local donut shop. The story and songs appeared to magically write themselves. Once completed, we hired a number of talented musicians, singers and actors who helped bring Wanda's story to life. We eventually sold around three thousand copies and three stage versions were mounted by family theatre companies in the city.

To this day I meet young adults who tell me they played Wanda repeatedly, literally wearing out the record (no tapes and CDs in those days). While this project for children appealed to my creative side, I did not connect this with my teaching life. Producing Wanda was fun. We played. Teaching was my work. In my mind, they were separate entities, progressing parallel to each other.

The journals: the potter and the clay

After a few years teaching kindergarten I decided to teach grade two, carrying many of the early childhood notions about teaching and learning into my work with older children. I concentrated on becoming a "good teacher". From a colleague I heard about The Calgary Writing Project, an organization affiliated with the National Writing Project in the United States. Their summer course introduced me to the writing process as advocated by Graves (1983, 1994)), Calkins (1983, 1986), Murray (1978, 1986) and others. My teaching life and writing life began to edge closer together. I learned about writing by working alongside young writers in the classroom and during the noon hour Writing Club (Jones 1988, 1993). I began to think of myself as a researcher, keeping samples of student writing and cassettes of conversations recorded during Writing Club. I was "listening to children – taking lessons from them" (Calkins, 1986, p. 10) rather than always bringing my lessons to them.

I opened the first journal September 1986, noting that this " is the year that I will pursue this reading-writing process - I've read Graves and Calkins and talked and experimented. I've decided to keep notes and observations as I begin this program" (journal entry, Sept 02, 1986). I kept notes as I drastically changed classroom practice in a grade one and two class, emphasizing reading and writing workshop, choices and peer teaching. Entries were specific to these topics and included few reflective passages.

The following year I joined a journal group. Pat Hogan, a consultant, colleague and friend, assembled a group of teachers who kept journals. We read and responded to each others' journals, writing comments on the edges of the pages. We met once a month

for a conversation. This combination of activities prodded my thinking. On the first day of September my entry was rich with personal thoughts and questions.

> I love the feeling of freshness, newness, wholeness, the 'opening bud' on the first day. My room is clean, organized, and after two months off I am always ready. Another awareness: once you been in a school for over 2 or 3 years, the years blend together - one into the next. Today could have been any First Day. Are the kids interchangeable after awhile? How can we care so much for this one now and forget her next year? Does this make us worse teachers? Or better? What makes this First Day different from the others? It is not this class, these particular faces. It's inside of us. It is my place in my road of life that's different from year to year. It's my place as a teacher my new ideas, my growth, my school, my reading, my health. My own son went to grade one today. It gave me a closer feeling towards the grade ones in my class. I feel sad and happy, all mixed up together. (journal entry, Sept. 8, 1987)

In the journal I wrote about children such as Victoria, who often uttered profound statements which taught me about learning, and Stevie, whose mother heard him talking in his sleep about producing published books. Some pages included lists of activities or lessons. On others I expressed my doubts and confusions. The act of writing it down was simple, yet revolutionary. I wrote about my work in the classroom and the others confirmed, challenged and taught me. While I wrote that "I don't know anything for sure. All I have is Questions. I don't have Answers." (journal entry, Mar. 24, 1987), the journals showed me what I was figuring out. Pat called this my "personal practical knowledge" and I used the term before reading the articles by Clandinin and Connelly.

Once introduced to their (1986) article I saw that my knowledge "is embodied, experiential and reconstructed out of the narratives of " my classroom life (p. 383). I could see these narratives in the journals. When Clandinin and Connelly describe teaching as recollections I could find these recollections in the text of my journal pages. The journals showed me that

> Knowing a teaching and learning situation as an experienced teacher is a matter of recollections from one's narrative called forth by the situation. These recollections are personal, for they are derived from a person's narrative, and they are practical for they are aimed at meeting the demands of the situation. (Clandinin and Connelly, 1986, p. 383)

I searched the journals for a moment that represents my knowing called forth by the situation. I found it in October, 1987. I had asked the students to write a story based on a prompt, then I collected and assessed their writing. I read them all quickly to get a general sense of the writing. The next morning I wrote in my journal:

> I have now looked closely and compared each child's story with their previous story. All have improved significantly in length, spelling, sentence structure, punctuation. I started noticing the personality or voice in each piece. That's why I like Victoria's stories, I realized, it is that magical, non-correctable, non-measurable, quality called voice. I like to think of it as personality or even life. The piece has a life of its own, part of the writer, but also separate from. Victoria's stories all have a light that shines through them. Why? Why do one set of words come alive when others don't?
>
> This has been one of those little breakthroughs for me. I've read about voice in Graves and Calkins and said 'ya ya sure I get that' without any real comprehension. Its like - we never really know something until we experience it, internalize it, live it. While I was reading these prompted stories I suddenly felt the spark of life in Victoria's stories - missing in most the others. (journal entry, Oct 12, 1987)

In this entry I 'discovered' voice, from the inside. These "recollections from one's narrative called forth by the situation" (reading a set of student assignments), prompted my sudden understanding of a piece of writing theory (voice in writing). Pat, in her comments in the margin, noted that "the voice breakthrough is a big one not just one of those little ones. It's such an important concept in writing but so hard to describe to

anyone else. Maybe each of us have to experience it as you have." Another member of the group wrote "I can really see your voice in this journal."

The other teachers in the response group noted that *my* voice was evident in my journals. This was a second revelation - I had been so captivated by Victoria's voice that I had not considered *my* voice.

That week my personal practical knowledge was brought to the surface for investigation. My recollections were personal, in my own story, but practical, meeting the demands of the teaching situation. My knowledge was revealed in my actions in the classroom. I learned from the students. Later I noted that while as a teacher I attempt to lead and guide, in this classroom I am "also a learner. The students and I are both the Potter and the Clay" (journal entry, 1986). I realized that a metaphor of the teacher as potter shaping the students is inadequate. For me, I am also the clay, being shaped by the students. I realized that students such as Victoria were shaping me. I never forgot those lessons.

Graduate School: a plotline of research and writing

A year later I registered in a Master of Education program at the University of Calgary and in September 1988, Jean Clandinin instructed my first class. For the first time in my life I loved studying. I had a new identity: student. Over the next six years of part time graduate studies I looked forward to the evening classes. The books, articles and group discussions inspired me. Each November while I completed report cards and parent-teacher conferences, prepared a Christmas program and wrote a paper for university, I wished I could study full time. Someday, I hoped to begin a PhD program.

In classes I wrote papers, and later published articles (Jones 1986, 1988, 1993, 1997), and two books of short stories (Jones 1991, 1998).

Crocus Hill Notebook, about the fictional Crocus Hill Elementary School, linked two of my passions: teaching and writing.

My life work of teaching children is a passion and I feel alive in the classroom where I work beside the future. To me, the classroom is a living place filled with all the tensions, quests, emotions of "real life". Writing is my other passion and I feel alive when I move inside a piece of writing. To me, the blank page is also a living place, to be filled with the reflections of real life.

I created a fictional class of children in a fictional school. The stories take the reader through a school year, bringing notions about beginnings, endings, curriculum, classroom friends, growing up, relationships. I based the stories on my lived experience and told specific stories about specific children. The stories are snapshots which represent moments in time.

This project was different than writing in my journal about Victoria's voice. These stories were intended for an audience, whereas my journals are personal and private, shared only with trusted colleagues. While writing Crocus Hill Notebook I continued to write in my journal.

In the spring of 1990, encouraged by friends and colleagues, I decided to apply for a vice-principal's position in a large elementary school. As a result I left one school and joined a new staff.

Teacher-administrator: moving beyond the classroom door

While I learned about the world beyond my classroom door, I experienced constant inner struggle with my place in that world. I called myself "teacher" but did not feel comfortable with "vice-principal". How could I remain true to me, placed in an administrative position? Who was "I" who had a desk in the office and a desk in the classroom? How could I best bring my interests and abilities to a school? What are my images of myself as an administrator? I grappled with these questions.

When I arrived the school welcomed me. A parent stopped me in the hall on my first day to meet me. Teachers and students knew I was the new vice principal and greeted me by name. While I felt welcomed I also felt like an imposter, convinced that I had been placed here by mistake and worried that the mistake would be discovered. After all, this school carried a reputation as a "Lighthouse School" and I was "just a teacher". In addition, they didn't know me. The students, teachers and parents in my previous school knew me, and I arrived here without a story - other than "the new vice-principal".

My administrative duties were assigned by the principal, based upon previous practice. The tasks were many and varied: supervising school patrols, coordinating volunteers, organizing grade six Outdoor School, chairing the Outdoor School parent meeting, attending School Advisory Council meetings, participating in several committees, evaluating teachers and participating in other daily business in the office. I enjoyed the challenge of learning so many new things in a new setting. I liked the people.

But by November I felt torn between administration and teaching demands.

I am conscious of the total school. I am torn between my class and the admin stuff. I am only in my class part time and I feel that I am losing them. When I can't sleep at night I am worrying about the class. I am worrying about my teaching, not the admin stuff. (journal entry, Nov 26, 1990)

I thought of myself as a good teacher, one who had just published a book, attended graduate school and presented workshops, yet my teaching fell apart. I failed at what I thought I knew best: teaching. I experienced many sleepless nights and often got out of bed to write in my journal about the students. I noted that "I can't allow a few kids to ruin the atmosphere for everyone... I have never had kids dislike me so intensely. I don't like being misunderstood" (journal entry, Jan 28, 1991). My relationships with the students worried me all year.

Teachers are always watched. Students watch us for lessons and instructions, but also they notice our haircuts or new outfits. I grew accustomed to that in the classroom, but as a new vice principal it seemed that everyone in the building watched me. I believed that I needed to teach well, to be a role model.

As VP I feel that I should be as good a teacher as I can be. I know people aren't really looking at me, however if things appear out of control then I don't look good and I don't like it. I guess I am expecting higher excellence out of me. (journal entry, Jan 28 1991)

But in my mind this did not happen. I wondered whether I could manage as a school leader when I couldn't even teach.

In one day I flit from this to that. Today: check off incoming reports, check mathathon forms, talk to 2 teachers about volunteer forms, talk to 2 kids on Patrols, call parents about conference coming up, talk about DTs after school, think about fractions unit.

When I am this bugged about a class I think that when the time comes to run a school - I will be even more tense. At least here I still lean on the principal. In the back of my mind the school is in his hands. When it is in my hands I'm not sure I can deal with that. (journal entry, Mar 20, 1991)

In addition to feeling watched by others, I became aware that others viewed me as an administrator, as "one of them".

I popped into Andy's class for 15 minutes after school and he thanked me for showing interest! I was surprised because dropping in to a teacher's classroom after school is something I have always done. I realized he was seeing me as an administrator. (journal entry, Nov 3, 1990)

That was the moment I realized he viewed me as an administrator, because he thanked me for showing interest. He thought that because I was an administrator, I watched him, and thus he thanked me when I showed interest in his teaching.

All my beliefs about myself were challenged. The difficulties humbled me and I became more open to the struggles experienced by others. In addition, I believed I lost everything I valued. I wrote that in my previous school, "my program approached my image of excellence. The kids were writing, publishing, sharing, reading. This year I am back to a teacher directed classroom with me checking homework. What happened?" (journal entry, April 15, 1991).

I continued to wonder what had happened to my classroom knowledge and skills. The year finally came to an end and I dreamed about school every night for the first two weeks of July.

Over the following years, I grew to enjoy working in this school, but my journals reflect a continuous inner struggle. As I learned the tasks required of a member of the

administrative team, I began to imagine the next steps "up". Could I picture myself sitting in the principal's chair?

This year I feel like I AM an administrator. I am comfortable in the office and I like being in the office. The biggest problem is that I don't want to lose the classroom. I love working with the kids. I think like a teacher when I walk into a school. I don't want to do the ordering, timetable, sorting the closets… that doesn't interest me. But I like working with the principal and assistant principal. They teach me a lot, we talk every day.

Sometimes I wonder if I am a good teacher, why take myself out of the classroom? Why put myself in the office? Where would I be making the best use of my talents? (journal entry, Nov 6, 1991)

Increasingly I felt myself moving into the office. I felt more ownership for the school.

This week I finished Outdoor School forms, talked to kids who missed patrols, talked to Cam who threatened to light Christine's coat on fire, called Sharpe's Theatre about mikes for the gym, went to pick them up, talked to Jan about parent volunteers for Christmas staff luncheon, talked to Louise about being new to the school, saw the choir off at the front door, dropped in on the Science Fair meeting and the Leadership Club, met with admin team, and what else – I forgot. I feel more and more ownership for the school events, more in touch with things going on. (journal entry, Dec 6, 1991)

The administrative team met everyday. We became friends as well as colleagues. The office became a place where we could talk in confidence.

Today we talked about the difference between being involved and not, being inside and outside. In administration you know more about the whole school, you care about hot dog days, assemblies, etc in a different way. I am learning that there are so many ways to do things, to think about things. (journal entry, Mar 13, 1992)

The following year I was promoted to acting assistant principal. This meant very little teaching time and direct involvement in every aspect of the school.

I am loving this. I am thrilled with the opportunity. I am contributing to the school. I am learning about budgets, ordering things and sorting them when they arrive, I am speaking at staff meetings, talking to support staff, teachers, students. I am involved with several committees: PD, Assemblies, Leadership, Lunchroom, Fundraising. I am in and out of each teacher's classroom and seeing a variety of teaching and learning situations. I attend system meetings for APs and hear the system news. (journal entry, Nov 15, 1993)

That year I noticed that the transition from teacher to administrator had somehow occurred. It is impossible to pinpoint exact moments, but I moved beyond the classroom door and became an office insider, with knowledge of school wide issues. I participated in everything from teacher evaluations and school resource teacher meetings to painting the front hall and arranging gift mugs for staff leaving the school.

The spring of 1994 I had experienced a productive year, completed my Master of Education degree and felt ready to move on.

Teacher-administrator: inner dilemmas

In September of 1994 many changes occurred in the school. Both the principal and assistant principal left the school. The provincial government discontinued community school funding ending our unique designation. Several teachers transferred or retired. I knew the history of the school and the new principal hoped I would provide a sense of continuity during the time of transition.

However, over the next two years, I felt increasingly devalued. After working in the office full time as acting assistant principal, I returned to my designation as vice principal. As a result, I re-entered a grade one classroom, which felt like a backward step. Even though I felt ambivalent about moving forward into administration, I did not like moving backward, to a previous level of administration. In addition, by returning to the classroom, I discovered that my joy in teaching was diminishing. Even teaming with an ideal team partner provided only a degree of satisfaction in the classroom, I felt like I was going through the motions. I felt physically cut into pieces - with the "Real Me" no longer

present in my body. In addition, when teaching most of the day I felt my previous inner tug of war between the classroom and the office. For me, the students came first and I felt resentful each time I was summoned to the office to hear about events which had occurred that day. Hearing about events and participating in events are different.

I continued to desire intellectual stimulation. I kept notes for the second "Crocus Hill" book. I attended the Writers Guild of Alberta conferences and bookstore readings. I engaged in conversations with a colleague as she completed her own Ph.D. research. I met with a small group of musicians on Fridays to rehearse several songs just for fun. Like the summer I wrote Wanda the Littlest Wizard, I experienced my creative life and teaching life as disconnected.

During the summer of 1995, I completed the first draft of Crocus Hill Reunion, a sequel to Crocus Hill Notebook, continuing the stories of the same children.

While I edited the manuscript later that year, I thought about the children I have known over the years. My own innocence and joy expressed in the first book was gone. I have become less optimistic. I wrote:

> The kids have lost their innocence. Some of us went into teaching because we thought the kids were "better" than adults. Pure and innocent. We were child like and innocent ourselves. Their loss has become ours. We became angry and disappointed. (journal entry, Jan 17, 1996)

In many ways the death of Kim (a fictional student in Crocus Hill Reunion) represented the death of my joy and innocence as a teacher.

At about this time, Pat Boyle, the Calgary Board of Education's Advisor on Gender Issues, distributed a survey to all male elementary teachers (Boyle, 1997). I sat at my dining room table answering the questions and I suddenly realized that *this* is my

topic! I have lived inside this topic. This topic lives inside me. Indeed, for the first time since the newspaper article about my role as a father figure, I realized that my maleness is a topic. Questions focused on job satisfaction, the culture of elementary schools, assumptions others make about men, administration, vulnerability, loneliness and masculinity. As I thought about my answers I realized that other men (whoever created the survey) have experiences similar to mine. I have rarely talked to other men about these issues. In my own mind I played down the fact that I am a man. Yet, simultaneously, I have always been a male teacher. In addition, I knew I wanted to write about this myself.

I visited Jean Clandinin at the University of Alberta to discuss the Ph.D. program. When I described the survey and its impact on me, she suggested that I read my journals for entries concerning this topic. However, I found that my journals contain no mention of my maleness. In addition, I did not refer directly to male teachers in the two Crocus Hill books. I have lived in this topic yet did not write it. I focused on children and curriculum. I focused on them, not me.

In 1996, for the first time in my life, I did not want to return to school.

> Dreaded going back. Felt stuck, depressed, uncertain about everything. I had to talk to the principal. I said "Let's go for a beer." I decided to trust my intuition. He seemed sincere. He said "Be happy. Don't worry about your reputation. You have a great reputation as a teacher, and as a philosopher. Figure out what you want but be happy." (journal entry, Aug 27, 1996)

He told me that his own quick rise into administration was common for young male teachers when he was hired. He taught for very few years when he simply received a call from central office, informing him that he was to be placed in a different school as

vice principal. He quickly progressed through the ranks and had been employed in various senior administrative positions "downtown". He encouraged me to make a decision one way or the other - stay in the classroom or pursue administration. He mentioned that "people" are impressed that, as a man, I have always taught young children and that I am an asset to any staff. He encouraged me to feel proud of my reputation, no matter which decision I make.

I left the conversation wondering about my own career path. Should I have progressed into administration more quickly? As a young man I liked feeling different, unique, welcomed. I enjoyed a special place on staff because I taught primary students. I defined myself as a creative teacher, a musical teacher, an effective writing teacher. But now, as my peers were becoming new administrators, I wondered why I could not decide. I felt confused but could not identify the sources of my confusion. I felt like a failure.

Meanwhile I noticed that the topic of my "maleness" continued to arise in conversations. While I wrestled with my own identity, as a teacher or administrator, others often seemed to notice nothing but a man. In addition, I heard more stories on the media about the diminishing number of men in elementary schools.

I wrote a poem in my journal on the first day, reflecting my desire for a change, and the need to walk through a different door.

My petunias and sweet peas
Are in full bloom again
And it is another First Day,
A First Day like the others
Yet new, unique.
Like the other first days
I stepped out onto the sunny playground
To meet my new class.

The students were lined up along the south wall
Behind the teacher names and class lists
waiting ....
Waiting for the teachers to call them in
And for the new year to begin.
I know many of the parents now that I have been here so many years
And I greet them and ask "how was your summer?"
I stand in the mob
Surrounded by children and parents
And introduce myself to new moms and dads.
One says "you have my permission to be strict with him,"
As he pointed to his son.
Standing on the sunny playground at the end of August
A last summer day and a first school day
Same yet different
I have opened up new doors and started down new hallways.
I am older.
Aug 30, 1996

I felt like I was limping along. Yet time moved relentlessly on.

Today I feel completely demoralized, completely hopeless, completely exhausted, completely angry. We are living in critical times, a mean spirited atmosphere of mistrust and criticism. I feel like I am on a sinking ship and I do not wish to be captain of a sinking ship. The honor in the work, the respect for the institution, the pride in our achievements are gone. Without honor and respect then you don't pay us enough. I am working in a battle zone and I don't like it. I am a fireman putting out fire after fire after fire. (journal entry, March 6, 1997)

Putting out fire after fire after fire had become exhausting and, at the same time, I enjoyed my success as a writer.

Looking at the picture of the launch for Crocus Hill Reunion, I see my pleasure with the two books. By this time I knew I wanted time to write, to reflect, to consider the questions of my search for identity.

Looking at Barbara I think about the other people in my life who supported me. My home life supported my school life and my writing life. Our growing sons were always a source of great pleasure and our home a welcome refuge at the end of each day. Barb attended the launch with me and we talked about my desire to return to university. Becoming a student for two years was a family decision.

Later that year I applied for admittance at the university and applied for a sabbatical from the school district.

And so, each week, from September 1998 to April 1999 I boarded the bus for Edmonton.

2. Restorying the plotlines as a researcher

Creating collages

I began this thesis with the story of boarding the bus to Edmonton "carrying my backpack stuffed with two shirts, three lunches, a binder, pens, my journals, a couple of textbooks, a tape recorder" (p. 1).

This is my point of entry into the ideas of Clandinin and Connelly (1998), for they state that "when persons note something of their experience... they do so ... in storied form" (p. 155). I told a story about boarding the bus and riding to another city, because "stories are the closest we can come to experience as we and others tell of our experience" (p. 154). Not only am I writing about this trip on the bus, but I rode the bus each Sunday, I am *in* the story. "Thus we say that people by nature lead storied lives and tell stories of those lives," (p. 155). I traveled to the University of Alberta to enter a new story as a full time researcher in the Centre for Research for Teacher Education and Development. I will tell stories, my own and the stories of others, since "narrative researchers describe such lives, collect and tell stories of them, and write narratives of experience" (p.155).

Now I will take those artifacts, those stories told in the previous section, and spread them out before me. In this section I will lay my stories alongside others' stories and examine them from new perspectives. As a narrative inquirer, I am "always engaged in living, telling, reliving and retelling" my own stories (p. 160). As researchers we "live out stories of our experiences, tell stories of those experiences, and modify them through retelling and reliving them" (p. 160).

Reflecting on the stories, I wondered how to retell them. While reading and writing notes I found myself collecting my thoughts around four topics. As I developed my thoughts about my experiences as a male elementary teacher, each topic seemed to represent a piece.

In this section I will retell my stories by creating four collages around these topics: Knowledge and Context, Male Teachers, Masculinity, Identity. The fourth collage, "Identity", contains elements of all the previous collages.

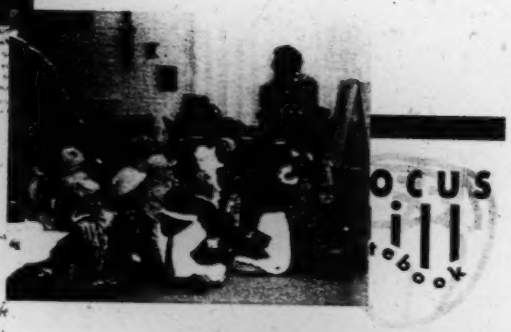
A collage is defined in Webster's (1988) as "an artistic composition made of various materials, glued on a picture surface", and "an assembly of diverse fragments and ideas" (p. 259). Collage is further described in The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory (Cuddin, 1997) as a "term adopted from the vocabulary of painters to denote a work which contains a mixture of allusions, references, quotations and foreign expressions" (p. 155).

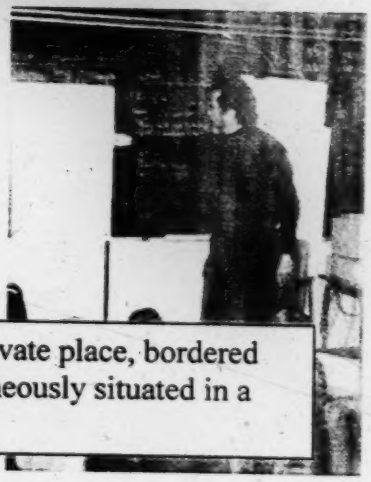
My collages assemble diverse images and text on a page, providing what Eisner (1997) calls "productive ambiguity" (p. 8), by which he means that the "material presented is more evocative than denotative, and in its evocation, it generates insight and invites attention to complexity" (p. 8). Thinking of the foundations of my research as collages helps me represent the complexity, ambiguity and messiness of the topic of men who teach young children. When reading the collages and the notes in each section, I hope that the "open texture of the form increases the probability that multiple perspectives will emerge" (p. 8).

Denzin and Lincoln (1998) refer to the description of the researcher by Levi-Strauss (1966), as a "bricoleur", who is a "Jack of a trades or a kind of do-it-yourself

person" (Levi-Strauss, 1966. p.17). Denzin and Lincoln go on to explain that a "bricoleur produces a bricolage, that is, a pieced-together, close-knit set of practices that provides solutions to a problem in a concrete situation" (p. 3). The solution "changes and takes new forms as different tools, methods, and techniques are added to the puzzle. (p. 3). The collages continue to evolve and take new forms as different conversations are added.

Knowledge and Context





My classroom is a private place, bordered by walls, but simultaneously situated in a public institution.

Collage 1: Knowledge and Context

I noted earlier that while teaching writing, I realized that I learned from the students. I wrote that the "students and I are both the Potter and the Clay" (p. 14). Students were shaping me and my teaching.

Not only students in the classroom shaped me. I look again at the photographs glued onto the collage and I see that my classroom is a private place, bordered by walls, but simultaneously situated in a public institution. When I sit beside those children in my classroom we seem to live in a world that is cut off and separate from the rest of the world. They are "my " students and I am "their" teacher. I care about them and I live in relationship with them. Yet, at the same time, we are connected to many families, connected to the institution of school, connected to the government and university, connected to the past and future. All these connections shape my work.

I began this collage with Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) notions about professional knowledge landscape and context firmly in my mind. However, a conversation with Dr. Eamonn Callan, who was with the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Alberta, added another perspective. He reminded me that teaching elementary school is embedded in the language of care and caring, and, he added, caring for children is viewed as women's work. Entrenched in the context of my life work is a rhetoric associated with women, and men who teach must be shaped by this rhetoric. He wondered if elementary schools have "feminine qualities" and wondered how men live in that world. He suggested I read Nel Noddings and Jane Roland Martin.

I left the conversation thinking to myself, "He doesn't get it." I have always believed that we must get beyond this simplistic thinking about men and women. But

with his words in my mind I began to see similar ideas in a range of readings. I slowly began to see that these ideas are indeed embedded deeply in my context. While as a teacher, I believed I was fighting against gender stereotypes, the very fact that I felt the need to "fight them", means they exist. I need to face them and attempt to understand.

Notions of caring are part of the elementary school context in which my classroom is situated.

As King (1998) points out, while "caring is an important aspect of teaching at all levels, love and care, as well as other nurturing behaviors, are privileged attributes of primary teaching. Care is synonymous with primary teaching" (p. 12). But in our culture, caring is attributed to women, and caring for children is viewed as women's work. Indeed, primary teachers are predominately women. But as King points out, when "primary teaching is read as caring, and caring signifies a female way of knowing, then men who choose to teach in these classrooms may be at risk" (p.3).

Noddings (1992) advocates an alternative approach to schooling based on an ethic of care which emphasizes "living together, on creating, maintaining, and enhancing positive relations" (p. 21). An ethic of care rejects universalizability, does not "posit one greatest good to be optimized"(p. 21), and it "is an ethic of relation" (p. 21). She states that the "need for care in our present culture is acute", (p. xi) and that we should "educate our children not only for competence but also for caring" (p.xiv). The social changes in the twentieth century must be taken into account and if "the family is now an anachronism, or if, for whatever reasons, families cannot meet the needs for caring, other institutions must fill the need" (p. 14). Schools must care. She observes that "at the

present time, it is obvious that our main purpose is not the moral one of producing caring people but instead, a relentless... drive for academic adequacy" (p. xii).

She claims that the "standard liberal arts education is not the best for everyone (p. 43) because it "places too much emphasis on a narrow form of rationality and abstract thinking as the hallmarks of fully human life. It neglects feeling, concrete thinking, practical activity and even moral action...". In addition, the liberal arts with this "overemphasis on the life of the mind leads successful students to believe they are superior" to others. Finally the liberal arts tradition "is largely a celebration of male life; activities, attitudes, and values historically associated with women are neglected..." (p. 43).

This philosophical position expressed by Noddings may sound "too feminine". Indeed, Noddings states that the education she envisions "puts a very high valuation on the traditional occupations of women" (p. 51).

Martin (1992), who writes extensively about the school as the moral equivalent of the home, notes society's suppression of domesticity. "It is no accident", she tells us "that history, literature, and the other subjects of the American school curriculum give short shrift to the world of the private home" (p. 139), which is connected with the traditional work of women. The world of work is viewed as "competitive and that the people there have to be pugnacious and possessive in order to succeed" (p. 138). If the role of education is to prepare students for the world after grade twelve then the three Cs of concern, care and connection "will be regarded as counterproductive" (p. 138). People fear that this would not prepare them for the real world.

Burgess (1989), writing about the careers of women teachers, points out that the construction of the "familial aspect of primary schooling equating the class teacher with a mother" (p. 85) creates a trap. "When teachers enter a primary school and make it theirs so that it is talked about in terms of 'my class' and 'my children', they also unknowingly support the career trap which prevents many very capable women from applying for promotion and maintains the notion of class teacher as a 'mother'" (p. 86). In addition, as Acker (1987) points out, the fact that the few men working in elementary schools are usually administrators, and the large number of women are teachers, is "one way society perpetuates its gender divisions through models presented to young children" (p. 86). When I moved out of the classroom and towards the administrative office I felt this trap. When I imagined myself leaving the classroom to become an administrator I felt I was deserting children.

My own work in the classroom, as reflected in my journals, does not appear *to me* to be feminine, or masculine. Behind the door I teach. Can I perform puppet shows with my younger brother and figure out "voice" in Victoria's writing and still be a man? Are my wall displays reflecting a "feminized" classroom? I love teaching and I value my relationships in the classroom. Must this be viewed as a "feminine" way of living? In what ways does this "feminine perspective" shape my work in the classroom? These questions are not easy to answer. But I see that my knowledge of teaching behind my closed door is shaped by the context. It is more than just me and the kids.

I now return to Clandinin and Connelly's thoughts about the professional knowledge landscape and context. After concentrating on teachers' personal practical knowledge in their earlier studies, Clandinin and Connelly (1995) "were constantly

reminded that teachers do not work in isolation, nor do they work in environments solely of their own choosing" (p. 3). They searched for a way to describe how personal practical knowledge "shapes and is shaped by" context.

> A landscape metaphor is particularly well suited to our purpose. It allows us to talk about space, place and time. Furthermore, it has a sense of expansiveness and the possibility of being filled with diverse people, things and events in different relationships. Understanding professional knowledge as comprising a landscape calls for a notion of professional knowledge as composed of a wide variety of components and influenced by a wide variety of people, places and things. Because we see the professional knowledge landscape as composed of relationships among people, places, and things, we see it as both an intellectual landscape and a moral landscape. (p. 3,4)

I see now that the ideas about gender and care so prevalent in elementary schools shape the intellectual and moral landscapes.

In their view, the landscape has two fundamentally different places, the "one behind the classroom door with students, and the other in professional places with others." (p. 5). They believe that this "split existence is central to the disturbance teachers feel" (p. 5), and dilemmas are created by moving in and out of these places.

"Classrooms are a special place within the professional knowledge landscape," Clandinin and Connelly explain. "They are places of action where teachers teach and where curriculum is made," (p. 12). My classroom was "a private place in the sense that teachers and students work behind a closed door" (p. 12) and I viewed it as a safe place.

Here I worked out my classroom practice and lived relationships unobserved by others. I thought about Victoria's voice in her writing. I kept boxes of unit plans and math activities collected over several years. Here I was free to live my own stories of practice, stories which were "essentially secret ones" (p.13) and were "told only to other teachers in still other secret places" (p.13), and especially to my friends in the logbook group. My work with children, as reflected in my journals, occurred in this safe place, behind the classroom door.

Clandinin and Connelly explain that when "teachers leave their classrooms and move onto another place on the professional knowledge landscape, they leave the secrecy of the classroom and enter a public place" (p.14), such as the staff room, committee meetings and hallways. In public places, certain stories take on a sacred quality, such as the notion that theory drives our practice. As a result when we discuss our practice in the out of classroom place we often choose abstract words that are removed from the actual work with children.

This theory enters via the conduit and the "language of the conduit permeates the out-of-classroom landscape" (p.14). It is through the conduit that "knowledge" is poured into the landscape, "packaged in textbooks, pamphlets, workshops, staff meetings, information sessions, memos and the like" (p. 10). The language is abstract. Here teachers cannot appear uncertain or tentative about their work, so they tend to tell cover stories, "stories in which they portray themselves as characters who are certain, expert people" (p. 15).

I was skilled at portraying myself as an expert in the out of classroom place. In the staffroom I appeared confident. My wall displays, assembly presentations and Writing

Club contributed to the cover stories. All my inner questions and excited discoveries captured on journal pages were not expressed publicly. My air of certainty led others to encourage my application for the vice principal position.

When I arrived at a new school as a vice-principal, suddenly my personal practical knowledge was insufficient. While I thought of myself as a good teacher, my teaching fell apart. I arrived in a school that did not know me. They had no story of me except that I was the new vice-principal and the established script for "vice principal" included school disciplinarian. Over the summer I had not changed. My position had changed.

> *I am conscious of the total school. I am torn between my class and the admin stuff. I am only in my class part time and I feel that I am losing them. When I can't sleep at night I am worrying about the class. I am worrying about my teaching, not the admin stuff. (journal entry, Nov. 26, 1990)*

The landscape metaphor helps me to understand my experiences as a vice principal, and, conversely, my experiences as vice-principal help me understand the landscape metaphor. I now occupied two positions on the landscape – the teacher in the classroom, and the administrator in the office. From my position as an administrator, my view of the school changed. I could see relationships among people, places and things which were hidden from me before. I visited the classrooms of other teachers, chaired committees, hosted assemblies, dealt with situations in the office. I also became a messenger for the conduit.

As an administrator I became more aware of system requirements, directives, expectations. Phone calls and meetings with senior administrators occurred more frequently than for classroom teachers. I wrote teacher evaluations and sent them "downtown" to become pieces in the career files of others. I recommended teachers for

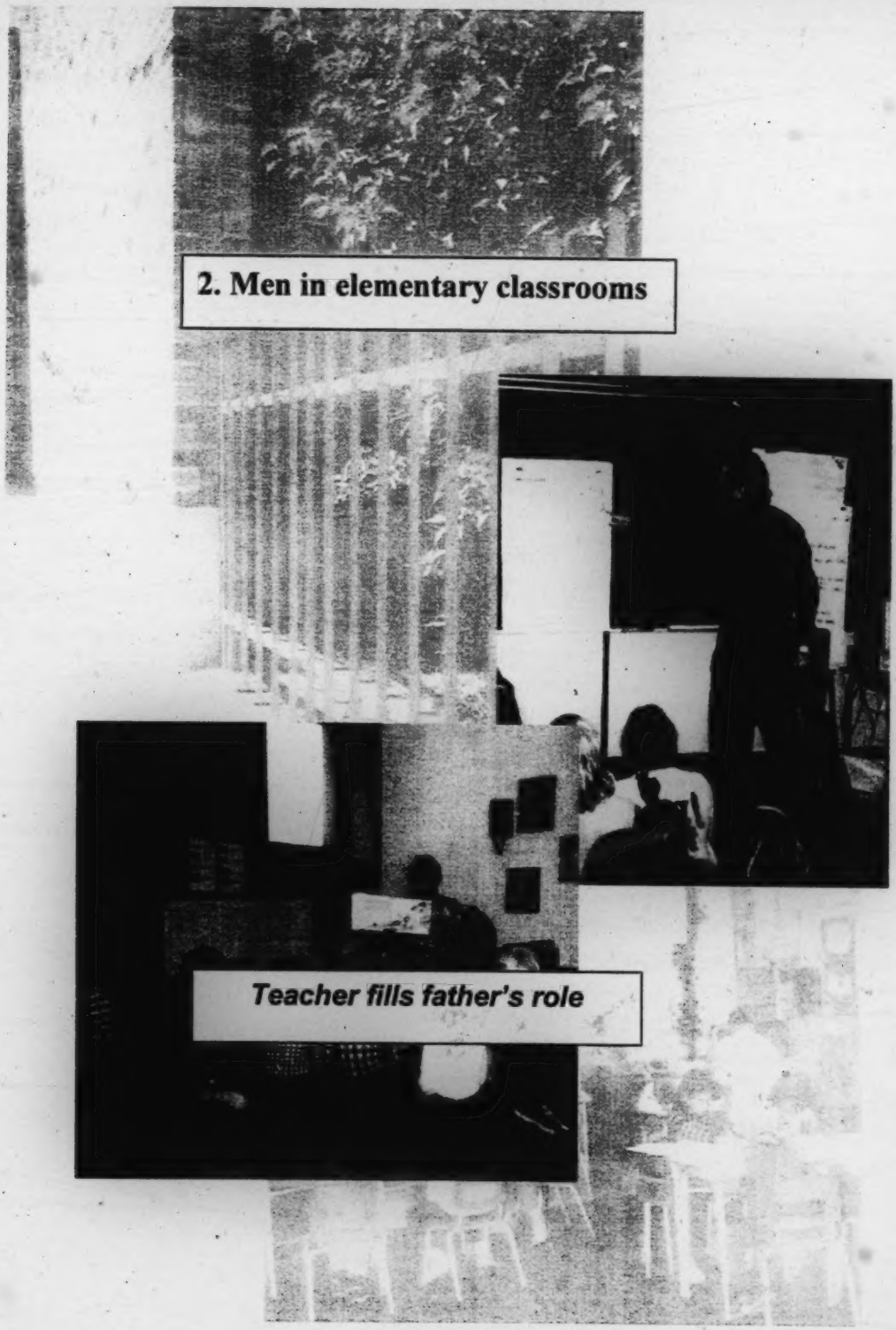
positions. I met with administrative teams from other schools. These experiences brought me closer to the system context.

While I discovered my competence and enjoyed this involvement with more people in the school system, I felt split. I did not understand why sitting in the chair in the classroom and the chair in the office felt so disturbingly different. But as Clandinin and Connelly tell us, moving back and forth across the border, between the in and out of classroom places, creates many moral and ethical dilemmas for teachers.

The institution itself did not support my previous work as a teacher-researcher. Clandinin and Connelly state that we have "the desire to tell stories; the desire for relationship; and the desire to think again, to reflect on actions taken and things thought" but the landscape is "ultimately unfriendly to the human desires" (p. 154). As a teacher, I dedicated myself to the students in my care and to my reflection. But I found the demand to split myself into teacher and administrator "unfriendly" to these desires. I did not know which story I wanted to live.

I tried to share these concerns with my principal, but, at the time, did not have this language. I did not know what bothered me. I simply felt confused. Who am I as a teacher? Who am I as a future administrator? What story will I live by?

My understanding of my story is enhanced when I think about knowledge and context, but this is not the complete picture, the collage includes white space. I am reminded by others that I am not only an elementary teacher, I am a *male* elementary teacher. I must take my body with me, everywhere I go, and I chose to go into primary classrooms with young children. The next collage reviews research about male teachers.



2. Men in elementary classrooms

Teacher fills father's role

Collage 2: Men in elementary classrooms

Allan (1993) states that men "who are elementary teachers are aware of others' attention to their maleness, as well as others' conflicting expectations and stereotypes of them as men"(p. 114). The article about me that was published in The Calgary Herald (Spearman, 1978) illustrates this attention. In the article, Spearman stated that I was the only man teaching kindergarten in the city, and that most primary teachers are women. In addition, "mothers play the dominant parental role", and I fill a father role for boys and girls because so many fathers are absent or working out of town. The principal said that "Different things can happen with a man teaching kindergarten", such as I was "more tolerant of the noise and commotion that a group of five year old boys are bound to make" (p. A1).

Behind the door of my classroom, teaching is what I do. I am a teacher. I cannot tell whether I read a story differently because I am a man. I cannot tell which parts of my effectiveness as a teacher are dependent upon my maleness. I no longer say that I fill a father role nor do I teach in order to "be a male role model". But outside the classroom even the city newspaper talked about my maleness.

I always felt valued and supported as a teacher, yet these words of support often include statements such as the following.

"It's nice to see a man in this school. There should be more of them."

"The boys need male role models, there are so many women in their lives with all these single parent families."

"I want my child in your class, he needs firm male discipline, he responds better to men."

"It's good for kids to see a man who reads."

"When are you going to move up the grades?"

"Are you going into administration?"

Statements like these represent what are described by Allan (1993) as "folk theories', or "commonplace public understandings of men in elementary school" (p. 114). He goes on to explain that these folk theories "conserve the concept of exclusive sex roles by ignoring the actual lived experiences of men who do this work" (p. 115).

There can be no doubt that teaching in North America is divided by gender (Allan, 1993; Allan, 1997; Boyle, 1997; King, 1994, 1998, Williams, 1993; Williams, 1995; and others) and the "fewness of men elementary teachers has persisted despite nearly a hundred year campaign to increase their numbers" (Allan, 1997, p. 1).

The number of men teaching elementary school continues to decline. A report published by the Calgary Board of Education (Boyle, 1997) indicates that in 1997-1998, 15 % of elementary teachers were men. In 1986-1987, 21% of the teachers with the same board were men. In November 1998, The Edmonton Journal published an article entitled "Male elementary school teachers are a vanishing breed" (Unland, 1998, p. A8), which stated that the "proportion of men enrolled in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta has decreased steadily over the past few years".

This is not a new issue in Canada. Wilson (1970) states that by

> 1915 eighty-three per cent of all Canadian elementary teachers were women. As men were attracted to other professions, and as the demand for teachers increased, school boards turned more and more to women, who were often willing to work for a lower salary (p. 317).

Opposing points of view about the appropriateness of male and female teachers are not new either. Wilson (1970) writes that in 1903 the Victoria School Board "decided that 'in the interests of tactful discipline and the cultivation of strength and character in boys' there must be more male teachers" while he reports that a "public school inspector in London, Ontario, J.B. Boyle, noted in his 1886 report that 'experience has proved that the character and disposition of the female fit her better for dealing with youthful mind ... The little one turns trustingly and fondly to the female teacher'" (p. 317).

Very little has changed. The view that men bring discipline and women bring warmth to schools continues. As Weber and Mitchell (1995) show us, our images of teachers have changed so little that children's drawings, popular novels, movies and television programs present a common portrait of teachers as unattractive, boring, repressed, repressive and certainly not sexy. The male teacher in a kindergarten class doesn't "look like a teacher". Women have often been considered ideal teachers of young children because of their "natural qualities." Yet when teaching is viewed as "mothering" then men are placed on the other side of a border. Must we label the caring shown for young children as "feminine" or "mothering"? Must we expect men to act as disciplinarians or as role models? Some people express the hope that a man will present a model of a less traditional expression of masculinity, so that children observe a man who sits on a chair reading stories to young children, assists with coats and hats and deals with women as friends and colleagues. Others hope that men will model traditional male behaviors so children experience a good disciplinarian, a sports coach, an administrator or a computer expert. Do we ask women to "be" female role models? Do we ask what kind

of female role models we see in elementary school? Is teacher-as-mother/nurturer an adequate female role model?

To become a "male role model" seems to be an unwritten expectation of the teaching position, yet when I sit in a classroom surrounded by children no one tells me how to "become" a role model, or what kind of role I should model.

Allen (1993, 1994, 1997) has written extensively about male teachers. The men in his (1993) study "were at a loss to identify exactly what this work (role modeling) consisted of" (p. 122) or how to do it, " beyond 'doing what men do'. They sensed others' conflicting definitions of the male role itself: the disciplinarian surrogate father engaged only in 'unfeminine' activities, or the feminine, nurturing, empathic companion to children" (p.126). Men are placed in a paradoxical position, he continues, for "even as they were expected to be a male role model, they were simultaneously stereotyped as feminine - because of the work that they do."

He coined the phrase "anomaly as exemplar" to express this contradiction. Men, who are engaged in work viewed as "women's work", are an anomaly, yet are asked to represent "maleness" to the students. Moreover, as teachers of young children, men walk a fine line, he continues. "Conforming too closely to traditional definitions of masculinity again raises doubts about men's competence as teachers, while emphasizing nurturance and sensitivity opens men to the charges of effeminacy, or even worse" (p.126).

In Sargent's (1998) study, "the topic of 'male role model' arose in every interview" (p. 12), and he noted that there was "not a single image of male role model but several, and these often conflict with one another" (p. 12). The men in his study described their perceptions of parental expectations.

> They expect men who teach boys to: (1) Show no interest in art and poetry; (2) Be a man in their lives; (3) Have an interest in athletics; (4) Be a disciplinarian; (5) Be an authority figure. In sum, the men are saying that, according to their understanding of the parents, what is missing in the boys' lives, and what men are supposed to provide, is someone who displays stereotypically male behaviors and attributes (p. 15).

Sargent adds that the men teachers "describe themselves using very 'feminine' attributes and descriptions" (p. 15). And the job itself is considered women's work.

Coulter and McNay (1995) argue that the call for more men teachers needs to be carefully examined, that the call has "ignored complex questions about gender relations in schools and in the world of work" (p. 17). "Significant questions are begged when being male is seen as a teaching specialty, when male elementary teachers are valued primarily as role models, and when 'quality education' is defined as dependent upon the presence of male teachers" (p. 17). King (1998) goes so far as to claim that this "role ambiguity inherent in male caring and the confusion that results from disrupting the expected gender-related social behaviors have contributed to some men's decision not to be primary teachers" (p. 5). Being asked to be a male role model, then, is not as simple as it seems, yet these are often the first words I hear from others when discussing this topic.

This section might have ended here, if I had not met Dr. Doug Aoki, of the University of Alberta's Sociology Department. In his course "Sociology of the Body", I read several articles about male and female bodies. The classroom conversations and readings helped me to formulate another piece of the collage, one that men who teach do

not easily discuss. Many discussions about relationships between men and young children either avoid these topics or touch on them carefully.

In that paper I placed snapshots of the male teacher beside an illustration of The Big Bad Wolf with Little Red Riding Hood. To me, this illustrated the male legacy passed on to me. Men are often portrayed as The Big Bad Wolf. We know that his motives are evil. The image of the wolf eating the girl is disturbing to us. When men behave brutally we call them animals (even though this is actually an insult to animals), and the image of man as wolf alludes to man as sexual predator. Men are often the perpetrators of violence against themselves and others. Recent media coverage of crimes against children in residential schools by teachers, in churches and schools by priests, at the arena by hockey coaches and in the home by parents brings this violence to our awareness. Recent school shootings in Canada and the U.S. involved young males.

As a man who teaches I hear these reports with mixed dread. I feel implicated in the crime by my own maleness, and feel the need to exclaim "but I am not like those other men." I feel horror that someone perpetuated such crimes against children who might have been my own students. I feel my sense of caring and compassion for those I have known, the children who have sat beside me. I see myself as others might see me, a possible Big Bad Wolf, molester of children. Then I wonder if the Big Bad Wolf lurks within me.

As the men in Sargent's (1998) study indicated, "nurturing children is judged dangerously close to molesting them" (p. 10). He goes on to say that "despite the apparent scarcity of molestation cases in the districts where I interviewed, the ever-present cautionary tales keep the men teachers both invisible and condemned" (p.11). One result

is that men feel that they are always being watched. This is a point of difference for men and women in schools. The men I know feel vulnerable when a child spontaneously hugs. I take precautions in my school life to protect my reputation. For example, I do not keep one child after school in my classroom. I do not take a child to a storage room to collect supplies. I am very nervous entering the boys' washroom while supervising the school, and never enter the girls' washroom. Yet the women can hug the children without fear, and will likely be commended for their relationship with children. At the same time, men who do not hug appear distant and cold. "Typical men."

Allan (1993) writes that men

> felt that they must overtly demonstrate care for children and sensitivity to their emotional needs. But behaviors, that are perceived as natural demonstrations of these qualities in women, are off-limits to men, who feel them as equally natural but as inviting suspicion of abuse" (p. 124).

These concerns were so powerful that several "men were fearful about demonstrating caring" (Allan, 1993, p. 125).

Even though I have always felt "valued as a rare commodity" (Coulter and McNay, 1995, p. 16), I agree with their statement that men who teach often feel "their motives, abilities and sexuality are viewed with suspicion" (p. 16).

King (1998) puts it even more strongly when he states that a "public perception is that men who teach primary grades are often either homosexuals, pedophiles or principals (in training)" (p. 3).

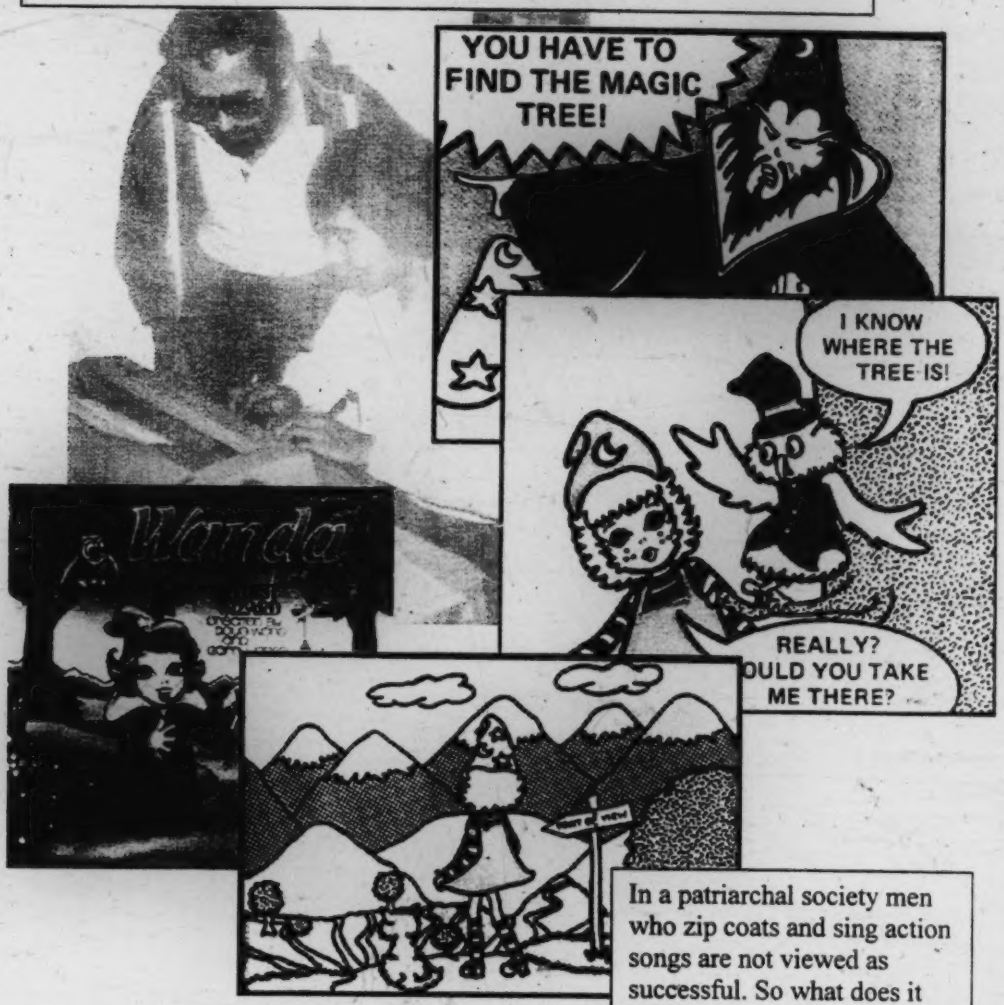
In Little Red Riding Hood's tale the other male figure, the hunter or woodsman who saves her from death, is identified in some versions as the little girl's relative, a father figure. Yet we barely remember him. He remains a minor character who enters the story at the last minute, and seems to have a distant relationship with the girl, her mother and her grandmother. It is the Big Bad Wolf we remember. And warn our daughters about.

On the other hand, the male teacher is also viewed as The Wizard of Oz, when he says "I'm really a very good man, but I'm a very bad wizard, I must admit" (Baum and Denslow, 1956, p. 78). In this case "bad" suggests inferior, inadequate, ineffective. Many people have told me of a teacher they know who is "a really nice man", often implying, "but he's not a very good teacher". Nice men, quite the opposite of the Big Bad Wolf, are not accused of any behaviour. They pose no threat. They are simply "nice men" who don't influence their world much, and get along adequately with other teachers on staff.

So male elementary teachers are either the wizards or the wolves? This is, of course, too simplistic. But it is this kind of simplicity that "informs" our common knowledge about men who appear on the news charged for committing a heinous act. It is this sort of simplicity that "informs" the common knowledge about men who teach. The teacher as "father figure" or "male role model" is simplistic, and maintains traditional gender roles. We imagine only nice dads and positive role models. We ignore the lived experiences of the men and the contexts in which they work. Our constructions of gender – the father figure, the nice man, the future administrator, serve to cover up these issues. They are not discussed openly yet they surface in every conversation about male teachers, in some form or other.

When I entered teaching in the seventies I "pictured change as a break with the old restrictive 'male sex role,' and the rapid creation of more equal relations with women" (Connell, 1993, p. 598). I thought the world was changing and that increasing numbers of young men would become elementary teachers with me. Twenty-two years later, men are not present in elementary schools. Little has changed. What does the literature about masculinity say?

3. Masculinity: The Wizard Supreme and Wanda



In a patriarchal society men who zip coats and sing action songs are not viewed as successful. So what does it mean to be a man?

Collage 3: Masculinity: the Wizard Supreme and Wanda

Doug Wong made up the story of Wanda the Littlest Wizard (Jones and Wong, 1979) for his nieces, and we developed the details at my dining room table. I return to Wanda in order to explore connections between the Wanda story, teaching and masculinity.

The story takes place in the Land of Wizdom, where "everyone had magical powers". "This land was ruled by a council of wizards headed by the Wizard Supreme," who is, of course, a man. A little girl, named Wanda, was being "taught the basic skills of magic and she was quite content at learning how to perform minor miracles until one day she realized that there should be a whole lot more to magic than just tricks!" She wanted to "really understand magic so she could become a wizard and use her gift to help other people."

She went to see the Council of Wizards who offered advice but no help. They expected her to remain in school for years, pass tests, and then she would receive her magic wand. The wands were produced from the branches of a Magic Tree "whose location had been kept secret for generations". Wanda went on a journey and found this tree with the help of a friendly Owl. In the process, she learned to believe in herself, to trust her intuition and to find the correct pathway by "following those reflections that are true".

The castle, the safe cottage, talking animals and trees, and transformative power of magic are staples in fairy tales. We added the themes of self-confidence and determination against all odds. In addition, Wanda, a little girl, disrupts the usual role

expected of girls in fairy tales. She leaves the schoolyard to seek the answers from adults, she refuses to follow the rules, she stands up to the Wizard Supreme, she needs no rescuing prince, she does not get married to live happily ever after.

When Doug created Wanda he hoped his nieces, as well as other children, would believe that they can succeed through hard work and determination. The transformative power of magic is actually inside of each of us, the Wizards do not possess the magic. While writing the songs, I viewed Wanda as a child, a little person, representing the weak or downtrodden. Her message of success was appropriate for each of us. We all face our own "Forest of Fears" and must often choose from many possible pathways. This reading of Wanda offered hope and inspiration.

Now, twenty years later, I re-read this story in relation to my research. I see all kinds of connections between Wanda and my teaching life.

The Wizard Supreme and the Council represent our political and social power structures. As Connell (1993) states, "human activity is institutionally bound. Three institutions - the state, the workplace/labor market, and the family - are of particular importance in the contemporary organization of gender" (p. 602). We are expected to remain in school until those in power allow us to leave. The system grants us a magic wand upon graduation yet we never know where the wand originates. We accept the wand, perpetuating the silence about the Magic Tree. The men at the top wield the power and they are unwilling to share the secret. They are active members of a patriarchal society.

Johnson (1997) states that a "society is patriarchal to the degree that it is male-dominated, male-identified, and male-centered. Patriarchy is male-dominated in that

positions of authority - political, economic, legal, religious, educational, military, domestic - are generally reserved for men" (p. 5). This describes the Council of Wizards, and "if superior positions are occupied by men, it's a short leap to the idea that men must be superior" (p. 5). The Wizards need to remain in power and thus control the system and symbols of power. Control "takes men away from connection to others and themselves and toward disconnection (p. 27). The Council of Wizards remain disconnected from life in the Land.

Society is male-identified to the degree that "cultural descriptions of masculinity and the ideal man ... closely resemble the core values of society as a whole" (p. 6). The Council of Wizards represent qualities such as "control, strength, efficiency, competitiveness, toughness, coolness under pressure, logic, forcefulness ..." (p. 6) and Wanda represents qualities such as "cooperation, mutuality, equality, sharing, compassion, caring, vulnerability, readiness of negotiate, emotional expressiveness, and intuition" and of which are "devalued and culturally associated with femininity and femaleness" (p.6). Even when Wanda strives to become a wizard, she intends to use her gift to help other people.

Patriarchy is also "male-centered, which means that the focus of attention is on men and what they do" (p. 8). Women "are portrayed as along for the ride, fussing over their support work of domestic labor and maintaining love relationships ...(p. 8). In this way Wanda disrupts the norm, as her story focuses on a girl's action. However, her actions take place in the context of the world dominated by the men and their rules, just as the actions in an elementary school take place in the same context. We don't know

what happens after the story but suspect that little has actually changed in the structures of power.

In a patriarchal society anything associated with women is devalued. Since teaching young children is associated with women's work, then teaching young children is devalued. Not only that, many men purposely avoid doing anything which appears feminine, since they must avoid appearing "like a woman".

Williams (1995) points out that men who work in jobs considered "women's work" legitimize their presence by masculinizing certain tasks (p. 17). Bordo (1994) reminds us that "it remains taboo for men to take on jobs that have been traditionally women's, and when they do, they often 'masculinize' them in an attempt not to be seen as soft or 'sissy'... Jobs that resist such masculinization (such as child care) continue to be seen as suspect fields for men" (p. 293). The men who choose to teach elementary school usually teach grade six, or teach a specialty such as science or physical education, or quickly enter administration. These choices result in men playing out traditional masculine roles. Sargent (1997) details ways in which men assume compensatory behaviors in the school such as taking on manual chores, fixing machines, setting up equipment and even confronting administrators on behalf of the (mostly female) staff.

In fact, because it is "Still a Man's World" (Williams, 1995) men often move into prestigious positions more quickly than do their female peers. Male nurses become head nurses, male teachers become administrators.

I followed the rules. The Wizards set out the tests, I passed them, I received my wand. By becoming a teacher I became empowered to pass out or withhold wands to the

next generation, and became part of the system. By entering graduate school I continue to place myself in a position of passing tests so the Wizard Supreme can hand me a wand.

Yet I am not quite a member of the system, I resisted the path set out before me. Like Wanda, as a young person I listened to my inner voice and took the pathway that was true for me. However, by choosing to teach kindergarten instead of high school English, I started out at the lowest level in a career devalued as "women's work".

I always thought that others encouraged me to pursue administration because they perceived my talents or abilities, as expressed in the out-of-classroom place. However, as I was reminded constantly, others saw a man, and men succeed. The success plotline is difficult to resist. In a patriarchal society men who zip coats and sing action songs are not viewed as successful. Yet simultaneously, I received messages that I should feel proud of my work with young children. In addition, I have all those cards and letters from former students and their parents.

In the Wanda story the Council of Wizards is presented in a negative light. Our stereotypical representation portrayed a patriarchal system. As a young man working with children, I did not like this vision of men. I resolved not to join the Council of Wizards, I certainly did not plan to become the Wizard Supreme. Later when I joined the administration team, this deep seated distrust remained. At first I did not know how to be true to me, while sitting in the administrator's chair. How could I become a principal, a Wizard Supreme, when I disliked that portrayal of men as leaders? As a beginning administrator, this was one source of my continuous inner conflict.

While Johnson's description of patriarchy fits the Council of Wizards, what does it mean to be a man in our culture?

"To be a man", state Kimmel and Messner (1987) "is to participate in social life as a man, as a gendered being" (p. 10). By the social constructionist perspective they mean that "our identity as men is developed through a complex process of interaction with the culture in which we both learn the gender scripts appropriate to our culture and attempt to modify those scripts to make them more palatable" (p. 10). They go on to say that "the experience of masculinity is not uniform and universally generalizable to all men in our society. Masculinity differs dramatically in our society..." (p. 10). To me, this says "there are many ways to be a man". As a child I preferred creative games and singing to baseball. As a young adult I discovered my pleasure in working with day care children. As a teacher I lived a life in relationship with children, where cooperation, sharing, compassion and caring are necessary. I saw myself as potter AND clay, being shaped by children. Simultaneously I have been a man engaged in these activities. I modified gender scripts.

Connell (1993) says that "masculinity as personal practice cannot be isolated from its institutional context" (p. 602). The context includes the "feminized" elementary classroom situated within our patriarchal society. He says that one "cannot be masculine in a particular way (which is to say, engage in particular practices constructing a given form of masculinity) without affecting the conditions in which that form of masculinity arose: whether to reproduce them, intensify them, or subvert them" (p. 602). Men who teach elementary are expected to reproduce, intensify and subvert, all at the same time.

As Zinn, Hondagnu-Sotelo and Messner (1997) state, it is clear that "nobody experiences themselves as solely gendered,"(p.6) but rather our identities are intertwined. They view these identities as a matrix linking race, class, gender, sexuality and national

origin. They further explain that not "only are masculinity and femininity relational, but different masculinities are interconnected and different femininities are interconnected through the structure of gender relations and through other social structures such as race, class and nation" (p. 6).

Goldstein (1994), in his introduction to The Male Body: Features, Destinies, Exposures, states that "the task of men's studies is to recover from history, and from empirically-observed behaviors in the present-day, that sense of choice and variety in self-definition that so many women have embraced as a means of personal and social liberation" (p. vii). Men, women, boys, girls - all people benefit when choice and variety are available to be lived.

Wanda's conclusion appears at first to continue the story tradition in which the character wakes up to discover it was all a dream. However, ambiguity and magic prevail!

As she left the room, she "walked past the dresser with the big oval mirror" and stopped and smiled. "After she was gone, a face appeared in the mirror - but only for a second - and then, it too disappeared! But you know what? It smiled back!" (Jones and Wong, 1979).

Her identity may have changed because of her new vision. Her identity, reflected back to her in the mirror, is complex and now includes ideas previously out of her sight. Like my next collage, "Identity," the picture is more complete.

4. Identity

My identities reside in my stories. In my mind this collage is unglued, suggesting possibilities and change.

Collage 4: Identity

This collage consists of artifacts and stories from all previous collages. I scattered the collection of photos and the drafts of this dissertation on my dining room table. I positioned the pieces and carefully thought about their placement on the page. I hesitated to glue any piece to the page as it would become "fixed."

Identities, state Connelly and Clandinin (1999), "have histories. They are narrative constructions that take shape as life unfolds and that may, as narrative constructions are wont to do, solidify into a fixed identity... or they may continue to grow and change" (p. 95). My identities reside in my stories, and as Crites (1986) says, "being a self entails having a story" (p. 162). The self "comes into existence only to the extent that it can be re-collected out of the past" (p.163). My identities, my narrative constructions in my life, re-collected in the previous collages, take shape as my life unfolds. Crites tells us that since the future is unknowable "self-knowledge, like other knowledge, is mobilized in pursuit of the unknowable" (p. 164). I wish my collages could continue to grow and change, like my narrative constructions, but I am limited by the requirements of paper and ink. The completed collages and the pages of cleanly printed text, appear "finished" and impossible to change. This fourth collage, then, links my knowledge, context and identity. In my mind this collage is unglued, suggesting possibilities and change. It is not fixed.

Connelly and Clandinin developed the narrative concepts of personal practical knowledge and the professional knowledge landscape "as a way of speaking about teacher knowledge" (p.3). However, they noticed that teachers "seemed more concerned to ask questions of who they are than of what they know" (p. 3). They were asking questions such as "'Who am I in my story of teaching?'; 'Who am I in my place in the

school?'; 'Who am I in children's stories?'; 'Who am I in my administrator's stories?'; 'Who am I in parents' stories?' (p. 3).

These questions capture the puzzles in my personal journey. While I concentrated on becoming a good teacher, my dilemmas were about "me", as I lived in the various contexts. I wondered how to be true to "me" while sitting in two chairs. I heard stories of me from others - male role model, father figure or future administrator - which felt incomplete. I wondered if people "didn't get it", because those words did not describe the complex "me" as I viewed myself with children in classrooms. At the same time, these constructions seemed to be solidifying into a fixed identity. When I was constantly given a limited set of stories from others, the multiplicity seemed to melt down into a single story.

These questions summarize my questions. Who am I in my own stories of teaching? This thesis attempts to outline those possibilities. Who am I in children's stories? Those notes and cards collected in the cardboard box epitomize a few stories, and, no doubt, other stories are told about me that I have not heard. Who am I in administrators' stories? Evaluations and remembered conversations behind closed office doors partially capture administrators' stories of me. These stories changed with the context and persons involved. And parents' stories? A few cards and letters hint at parent stories of me, but these too, are incomplete.

I can really only know what I experienced, and even then I am often unaware.

As they listened to teachers, Connelly and Clandinin (1998) "realized that the theoretical puzzle was to link knowledge, context and identity" (p. 4) and the phrase "stories to live by" is used to refer to this link. "Stories to live by are shaped by such

matters as secret teacher stories, sacred stories of schooling, and teachers' cover stories" (p. 4).

My stories, my journal entries, my photographs reveal my stories to live by, my desire to live many plotlines. I am a brother, father, husband, teacher, writer, musician, gardener, friend. I cannot choose one plotline over the other. It is not "either/or" but rather, "and". My confusion about who I was and who I could become may be resolved when I realize "I am all of these." As Lugones (1987) says, "I am a plurality of selves" (p. 14). As I move from home to school, from classroom chair to office chair, from teacher to student, I experience myself travelling between different places, I travel between different "worlds".

Lugones says that " 'world'- travellers have the distinct experience of being different in different 'worlds' and of having the capacity to remember other 'worlds' and ourselves in them" (p.11). When I am sitting in the office chair I remember myself in the classroom chair. She adds that this "shift from being one person to being a different person is what I call 'travel'" (p.11). As vice-principal and teacher I travelled between the different worlds in the school. At times I felt at ease in either world and I could be "a fluent speaker in that 'world'" (p. 12). At other times I felt ill at ease, while I learned to behave differently in each world. Writing about her experience as a Latin-American, Lugones states that this "is a very familiar and recognizable phenomenon to the outsider to the mainstream in some central cases: when in one world I animate, for example, that world's caricature of the person I am in the other world" (p. 13). In one 'world' we may become the stereotype. As a male elementary teacher, I became a stereotype.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) point out that different "facets, different identities, can show up, be reshaped and take on new life in different landscape settings" (p. 95). Men who teach young children are crossing borders between worlds. We are expected to behave "as men" while simultaneously demonstrating "appropriate" caring. We must demonstrate appropriate caring and also seek "success" by removing ourselves from the classroom.

My identities changed over time. Looking at the pictures from my classrooms I see myself sitting on a small chair surrounded by children. The scenes look the same but inside, I am different. Time has added experience to experience. While I move towards the future I can only recollect the past. My past is on the other side of a border.

I am on a journey and live my life "in the midst of things, as beginner or learner or explorer" (Greene, 1995, p. 22). My journals reflect this constant journey, and like Greene, my "life project has been to achieve an understanding of teaching, learning, and the many models of education; I have been creating and continue to create a self by means of that project" (p. 1). As I played childhood games with my brother, wrote songs with friends, learned about writing with students, reflected on classroom practice with colleagues I placed myself in the midst of things, asked questions, searched for different doors, and hoped I brought my lessons to the classrooms. In the process, I created a self. My entry into graduate studies and this research project continues my life long journey.

Teaching, as Greene says, is concerned with action, which "signifies moving into a future" (p. 15). "All we can do, I believe, is cultivate multiple ways of seeing and multiple dialogues in a world where nothing stays the same" (p. 16). As I investigated images of the men who teach young children I asked questions, because only "when the

given or taken for granted is subject to questioning, only when we take various, sometimes unfamiliar perspectives on it, does it show itself as what it is - contingent on many interpretations, many vantage points, unified (if at all) by conformity or by unexamined common sense (p. 23). This topic defies simplicity. There are many interpretations and vantage points as we each live our own lives through space and time.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) tell us that the "landscape metaphor helps us to see the possibility of borders that divide aspects of professional knowledge" (p. 101). Borders divide. Borders can be spatial as well as temporal (p. 104) and schools are organized in space and in time. My stories touch on many borders: between men and women who teach, between children and male teachers, between secret stories and cover stories, between in classroom places and out of classroom places, between expectations and realities, between past and future. When I crossed borders I not only disrupted the stories of a school, but I often experienced moral, ethical and personal dilemmas. The dilemmas and disruptions can serve to reveal the hidden.

And the hidden existed right before my eyes. When I wrote that the children shaped me, I touched on a much larger issue. The landscape itself - with its complex interconnected web of history, people, institutional expectations - played a role in shaping who I am becoming. While writing the stories and creating the collages I became fascinated by the role others played. The next collage, the fifth collage, explores this interaction between stories to live by, and the landscape itself.

Connelly and Clandinin (1999) tell us that teachers' "stories to live by are more than the conceptual knowledge of curriculum, teaching, subject matter and so on. They are expressions of an embodied knowledge of the landscape, of space and time, of

borders, cycles and rhythms". Our "stories to live by have moral, emotional and aesthetic qualities. So does the landscape" (p. 113).

While preparing the studio for this research project, I have collected artifacts and created the first four collages. In these collages I described my embodied knowledge and my journey through time.

Next I will describe the process of creating the fifth collage, the year long research study with Peter Thompson, a male grade one teacher. I met him in 1997 while I worked in his school as a literacy consultant, and we had discussed my research on several occasions. This year long study that is the subject of this document.

I begin the research with one more thought from Clandinin and Connelly, from their (1998) chapter in the Handbook, where they refer to the four directions of focus.

> To summarize, methods for the study of personal experience are simultaneously focused in four directions: inward, outward, backward and forward. By inward we mean the internal conditions of feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions and so on. By outward, we mean external conditions, that is, the environment or what E.M. Bruner (1986) calls reality. By backward and forward we are referring to temporality, past, present and future. To experience an experience is to experience it in these four ways and to ask questions pointing each way. (p. 158).

The fifth collage, the research collage, attempts to study Peter Thompson's personal experience, focusing on these four directions.

3. Creating the Fifth Collage: The Artistic Process

"It looks spooky without any people.

Looking at this photo,
my friend,
who is not a teacher,
noticed the absence of Others.

"I have never been
in an empty classroom."
she said.

Introduction

The empty classroom seems spooky? Why?

Until my friend said this it never dawned on me that students are rarely alone in a classroom. After all my years in schools, I must admit that I do not like to stay alone in the building at night. It's more than personal safety – an empty school *feels* spooky. Why?

Looking at this photo, with the teacher's chair in the corner, the words on the chalkboard, the boxes lined up against the wall, I see a classroom. Even without students, I think the space would be identified by most people as a classroom. It could be virtually any classroom in the world, it has universal characteristics. But it is not any place – it is this classroom at this moment in time.

Even though the teacher and students stepped out of the room, their traces can be seen in the teacher's chair, the names on the blackboard, the notices pinned on the wall and the boxes on the floor. Perhaps it is because of these traces that an empty school seems spooky. In addition, as my friend pointed out, students are rarely in an empty

classroom. Schools are often vacant, with doors securely locked. Or they are full of students and teachers. Schools are built to accommodate groups of people. Because of our experiences as students, we know school as a place where we are in groups. Without occupants, this building cannot fulfill its purpose. Without an interpretation, or more information, this particular classroom is impossible to locate in time or place.

Looking at this photo, the classroom only *appears* empty, for I was standing there with the camera in my hand. I snapped the photograph. I was a guest in this classroom for several months during the 1999-2000 school year, carrying out my doctoral research. I lived inside this classroom, coming to know the children and Peter Thompson, the teacher. This is Eastside Elementary School, where many of the stories in this dissertation occurred.

Peter Thompson came to Eastside with only four months experience on a temporary contract. This was his first permanent position.

When I came here, I had a few days to set up and prepare. I was looking at what the other grade one teacher was setting up and I was very stressed out, because I was trying to do what she was doing because she was supposed to be a good teacher, and my lack of confidence, and the room that I set up at the beginning of my first year wasn't my room. I didn't have a lot of stuff to put in it. The chairs and desks were all in rows and there was nothing on the walls, I put up my meager few things, I felt very conspicuous, I felt like the new kid on the block. All the teachers were putting up the things they collected – the pictures they'd laminated and drawers and boxes full.

Now I have my own ideas how my classroom should run, because I know it works for me. So when I first came it was hard, it didn't feel like my room, it really felt strange coming to school, I felt like I was in a different place when I came. (Peter, taped conversation, March 3, 2000)

As a rookie he noticed teachers "putting up the things they had collected" and he had collected only a few things. He lacked confidence beside the other grade one teacher, who was known as a good teacher. Now, four years later, he has his own ideas about his

classroom, and those boxes on the floor are filled with his stuff. His identity is developing. But how? How is his identity being shaped? How is his "becoming" being shaped by this space? How is the space shaped by him? These questions guided this research during my time in this classroom.

I know this is a photograph of Peter Thompson's classroom, a living classroom, and the children have just stepped out. I deliberately framed a picture of school with no children caught in the frame. Why did I take pictures of this classroom without children?

It seems ironic, but my study of bodies must not allow the reader to see the bodies. I completed the request for permission to carry out a research project and submitted it to the school system in a mid-sized Canadian city. I wrote that I intended to listen to stories told by Peter Thompson, a teacher with four years experience, and to stories told about him by parents, staff and children. I intended to listen to how he is storied by others on the school landscape, and how these stories shaped him. I said I was thinking about how one teacher's multiple identities are shaped. I indicated that I would write field notes, keep a journal, tape record conversations with parents, staff and students, collect student work and take photographs. Because I am interested in stories told and lived in this classroom with grade one children and a male teacher, I wanted the readers to see the bodies, or at least photographic representations of the bodies. I hoped to lay photographs and paragraphs side by side, like a collage, revealing the interaction/intersection of stories.

However, the school board reviewers of the ethics statement expressed concern about possible harm to the "human subjects". They wanted to know why I would take photos, how I would use them, when I would destroy them. They were concerned that if

photographs were published, someone could place them on the Internet at some future time. The district could be sued, in the future, for photographs they allowed me to take in this classroom. The local space could become international. Their response is due in part to the Freedom of Information and Privacy Act, which guarantees the privacy of individuals in public institutions. I applied for permission to carry out my research project at a time when institutions were still determining their responses to this act.

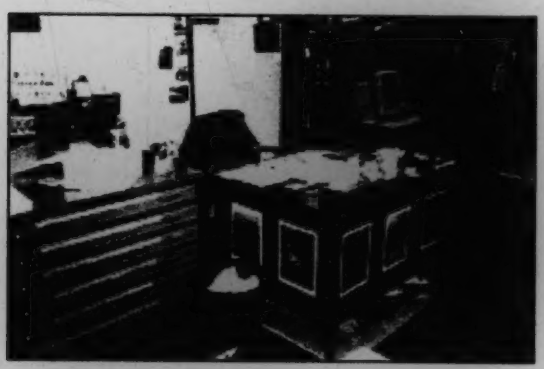
In addition, with photographs, there would be no anonymity. Photographs of the teacher and children sitting together would reveal the school site, the teacher and the children. This is rare in educational research. I was strongly advised not to publish photographs of bodies in my dissertation. Feeling anxious to begin my research, I agreed to take no photographs of children.

I took photographs in the school, however, ensuring that none of them published would reveal the actual school. I took pictures of hallways, doors, desks, chairs, wall displays and classroom spaces. The photographs are securely stored in a file at home.

Photographs of faces, it seems, are too revealing, too graphic. Faces would reveal identity, ethnicity, gender and hints of social background would be apparent. This implies that my text will not reveal the identities of the people involved – thus, the camera is dangerous but the pen is safe? The photograph is problematic but the paragraph is harmless? So these words, rather than revealing, actually serve to conceal. The interplay of text, photographs, field notes, taped conversations and journal entries, conceal aspects of my story as researcher in this space, from the reader. In a contradictory way, while concealing identities, this research is expected to reveal the "facts". I wonder if "truths" can be read without the bodies. Can "facts" about people in a classroom be disembodied?

The school itself must also remain concealed. Instead of identifying the school by name, I provide a pseudonym, from now on calling it "Eastside Elementary". Instead of identifying the teacher, I use the pseudonym, Peter Thompson. Instead of publishing photographs I utilize words to describe the school as a low, one-story building on a large playground. A row of portable classrooms along the south wall, once filled with students, now sit empty. Presently eleven classrooms in the main building serve 320 students from kindergarten to grade six.

Also missing are photographs of the neighborhood, which might identify the community, and as a result, the city. The school is close to ethnic restaurants, small warehouses, fast food outlets, gas stations and mini-malls. Years ago, when the school was new, this area included small factories and other light industries that employed large numbers of people. Over time, these closed, leaving the community in transition. The students in Peter Thompson's class lived in condominiums or single family dwellings, some neatly kept and others in disrepair.



This photograph of the teacher's desk in the empty classroom reveals what is missing. What is "not present" is now obvious. This photo hides the children, teacher, school, community and city. In hiding their identities, we must look instead at manifestations of the bodies, at traces. Readers must now imagine the bodies, called up in the imagination by my text, and the drawings.

Looking at these photos, *today*, I am reminded that photographs are always about the past. Even when the film is developed instantly, the moment becomes the past. These photographs preserve the moments in the past, between August, 1999, and March, 2000, when I lived in this classroom. Yet, they become more than mere preservers of the past. While I was in the field, the photographs were collected as field texts. I scanned them and placed them in the computer hard drive, I printed copies and pasted them in my journal, I looked at copies scattered on the desk while writing this, I placed the photo in this text and now I write. It will become part of this dissertation and part of future discussions. As I write these words the photographs and I have moved through time and yet I look at the photographs in the present.

While I regard them as field texts, I do not consider them to be mere reflections of the field. Harper (1998), writing about the authority of the image, reminds me that the "postmodern critique of photography begins with the idea that the meaning of the photograph is constructed by the maker and the viewer", and that the "meaning of the photograph changes in different viewing contexts" (p. 140). The act of placing these in this dissertation changes their meaning. In addition, while they may to some extent, reflect the "actual" classroom, they are carefully constructed to exclude the bodies. The photographic "image is 'true' in the sense (physical or electronic manipulation aside), that it holds the visual trace of the reality at which the camera is pointed. But the more fundamental issue is to recognize that all images, despite their relationship to the world, are socially and technically constructed" (p. 136). These images, then, are constructed by me as I pressed the shutter button, scanned them, placed them here and printed them.

They are included as field texts, they also inspired my writing. By placing them on the computer screen and manipulating their size or location, I often moved from photograph to writing. Thus they played an active role in this work.

I include them here because, as Harper concluded, "images make kinds of statements that cannot be made by words..." (p. 147), and as artifacts in a collage, images add to the complexity of this work.

As I write about photographs, I wonder about my other methods of "data collection". I look at my other field texts and wonder if they are any more accurate or revealing than the photos? What is revealed and what is concealed? My interpretation of the moments in this classroom, are based in "data" that I can touch – tapes and notebooks – yet my interpretation simultaneously conceals and reveals. As a researcher, I noticed certain features, and I saw what I was looking for. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me:

> ...the way we enter the inquiry field influences what we attend to. We deliberately select some aspects that turn up in field texts. Other aspects, less consciously and deliberately selected, also show up in field texts. To understand what narrative inquirers do as they write field texts, it is important to be aware that not only selectivity takes place, but also that foregrounding one or another aspect may make other aspects less visible or even invisible. Field texts, in an important sense, also say much about what is not said and not noticed (p. 93).

I interpreted the experience in the field, through my own experience as an elementary teacher. I selected "some aspects that turn up in the field texts" and rely on those field texts now as I begin to shape this dissertation. Like inspecting the photograph

for traces of the occupants, I must examine the other field texts for that which is revealed and concealed.

In addition to my photographs, field texts include field notes, journal entries, tape recordings of conversations, children's work, and other items. I spread them out on the desk.

The Field Notes

> Today when I walked into class, Jeffey said "I like your jacket, Mr. Jones." Others greeted me – (I am) accepted in the class. I notice his (Peter's) routines are established. Children came in, put agenda books in bin, he started the lesson. There is one new boy and several missing. Some moved already, one boy injured his eye, two have chicken pox.
>
> Field notes, September 16, 1999

As this segment from my field notes illustrates, I felt very comfortable in this classroom by the middle of September.

It helped that I already knew this school as a result of a special literacy project. During the 1997-1998 school year I worked in this school for six weeks as a member of a Literacy Support Team, and felt welcomed instantly. I remember going to the staff room at lunch on our first day, and upon hearing a great deal of loud conversation and laughter, asked if there was a meeting. "No, it's just lunch time." The room was full, and these people seemed to be having fun. Over the following six weeks, our team enjoyed working in this school and the project appeared to be successful.

A year later, when I began my doctoral program, I asked the principal if I could return to carry out my research. During the 1998-1999 school year I completed a pilot project in this school and, as one part of this study, interviewed the men on staff about their experiences as teachers in elementary schools. Later that year, I asked Peter

Thompson, the grade one teacher, if he would like to participate in my doctoral research study. One of the other men taught older students, and the other man was promoted to an administrative role. Peter, on the other hand, chose to teach grade one, liked younger children, and was a relatively new teacher. In those first interviews he seemed to be reflective about his work, enjoyed pondering ambiguous questions and was not threatened by my presence in his classroom. He eagerly accepted.

As a doctoral student, every time I visited the school I wrote field notes. I bought red coil-ring books to distinguish them from my journals. From August to December, 1999, I went to the school two days a week and from January until April, 2000, I went every day. Sometimes I wrote while sitting in the library, sometimes during class, sometimes after school.

Each morning when I arrived, I went to the staff room and removed my coat. Most mornings several people came in and poured themselves a cup of tea or coffee. Teachers, office staff, classroom aides and the administrative team all came to this space. Some stayed to talk, others went to work.

When the bell rang I went to the classroom. Each morning, the teacher gathered the children in the story corner. They sat on the floor and he sat on the chair for all group lessons, and I either sat at a table or at the back of the group. The students usually moved to their tables to complete assignments and I joined one table, choosing a different table each time. I helped students complete their work, I asked questions or I simply listened to the table talk. I often wrote my field notes while sitting at a table. A child always asked "What are you writing?" and I read it back to them. During the first few days, Peter also wondered what I was writing, and I read excerpts to him. I made it clear that my field

notes were open and available to him, and during conversations I often read excerpts out loud. He did not ask for my notebooks in order to read them.

In addition to helping children with their work, I occasionally directed activities. As it turned out, Peter was away from school on the first day of classes. His team partner and I looked after the day's activities, although I did not know what routines he would have taught them. We sang, read, drew pictures and played name games. Because of this day, the students seemed to accept me as a participant in this class.

During the year, I directed the whole class when the students completed writing and drawing activities for this research, described later. I also recorded conversations with small groups of students, described later. I did not ask the children about male teachers, and only heard one unsolicited comment about this teacher's gender, represented in the September 16 field note (left).

> Darrell: drawing a sun picture suddenly said You know what? I was twice shy. In ECS and when I was four. Now I'm not because I have a boy in class (Who? I asked) Him – Mr. Thompson. (Why were you shy?) Because I'm shy when I see adults who are girls.
> Field notes, September 16, 1999

As a researcher I shifted back and forth between participating in the life of the school and observing the life of the school. I felt welcomed by the children and the teachers. In the classroom I acted as a volunteer, working with students and helping with classroom tasks. At the same time I observed.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind me that "so long as researchers are diligently, day by day, constructing field texts, they will be able to 'slip in and out' of the experience being studied, slip in and out of intimacy" (p. 82).

The Journal Entries

I wrote field notes when I was in the school, and at home, I wrote reflective journal entries. To me, my field notes were like a daily logbook, noting the events of the school. In my journal, I reflected about the research. In addition, I played with the media involved in creating collages.

While I have kept journals since 1986, they have changed over the past several months. Dr. Michael Emme, of the University of Alberta's Faculty of Education, attended my proposal presentation, and later loaned me a book entitled The Journey is the Destination: The Journals of Dan Elden. Elden, (1997), who was a journalist and artist, kept journals from the time he went on a school field trip until his untimely death in his twenties. His journals pages consisted of brightly colored paintings, photographs, comments, newspaper articles and sometimes "junk".

> When I read The Journals of Dan Elden, I decided to play around with collage – in my journals. If I am thinking about life as collage, research as collage, collage as methodology – then why not play with collage now – in my journals? I wonder if this will explode, expand my ways of observing the world around me, to see things differently, to see intersecting stories?
>
> Journal entry, November 28, 1999

I began to paste more items in the journals such as tickets to the theatre, photographs and newspaper articles. I experimented with fold out pages. Using my computer, I scanned photographs, reduced their size, played with the colors and printed several copies. I created collages of images on a few pages. I continued to write but now the text ran around the edges of the artifacts. I cut up a copy of an article by Eisner (1995) and wrote my responses to his article between the pieces. I showed the journals to friends and acquaintances and wrote about those conversations. For example, I was showing my

journal to my friend, Nancy, when she commented that the classroom pictures looked "spooky", and later I wrote about her comment.

> These photos portray place – the classroom place at a moment in time. The absence of people – of bodies – is "spooky", according to friend Nancy. She has not been in a classroom alone but a teacher is often alone in "his" classroom. So what makes it "his"? We obtain a teaching position after applications and interviews and we are placed in a school. We go out to the school. Someone takes us to see our new classroom. Peter was talked about on the telephone, the previous principal saying "he's good" the present principal met him. Now it is "his" classroom.
>
> The children become members of this classroom through a long chain of events (a collage of events?) that are beyond their control. They are in a certain place at a certain time at a specific age and they enter this class.
>
> Journal entry, January 24, 2000

While I have lived a journal writing life for many years, this research experience provided the gift of time – time to explore my writing processes in depth. Always I asked myself: how is this helping with the research?

Conversations with Peter

Field texts include the tapes of conversations, along with my notes about the tapes. I had different conversations with different people.

Each Friday, Peter and I met in a closed office, ate our lunches, and talked. We taped every meeting. Sometimes I came to the meeting with questions based on my observations in class, my reflections, our previous meeting or my meetings with my advisor. Sometimes I had no agenda. Sometimes he came to the meeting with a "burning topic" which he launched into as soon as we sat down.

Before this research began, we agreed that when I met with anyone to talk about him, Peter would receive a copy of the tape. I told each person before we began, that

Peter would be listening to the tape of our conversation. After each meeting I made a copy and handed it to him. He listened to the tapes in his car while driving to and from work. On the following Friday we discussed his responses to that conversation.

This added another layer of stories. While he told me his own stories, we also heard how he was storied by others, and then we discussed those stories.

Conversations with other adults

I usually met staff members or parents in a classroom or office during the school day. I met two teachers in a local restaurant. This school is on a modified calendar, so the students returned to school on August 16, 1999. I wanted to meet with the first two teachers during their October break, so meeting in a restaurant was convenient and enjoyable.

I met with teachers, child-care assistants, office staff, administrators and several parents. In this text I will not indicate their position on staff and names have been changed. I will indicate that the adult is a staff member or parent.

I did not come to these conversations with an established list of interview questions. I began by asking the participants to tell me their work or parenting history, and they usually concluded by explaining when and how they came to this school. Then I asked something like "tell me about the first time you met Peter Thompson, what was your first impression?" That usually led into a conversation about Peter, his classroom and this school. This, in turn, led to many other issues about teachers, teaching and schooling. I was surprised how easily we slipped back and forth between the specific discussion about Peter, and the general discussion. After a while I thought to myself that much of this is not about Peter. He was merely a story starter.

Here is one example of this, where the staff member immediately jumped to a generalized statement.

"Tell me about when you first met Peter."

"We just met in the staff room and it was nice to see men coming on staff, and we appreciated the fact that we had a few men because it gave a different perspective to learning." (Melanie, taped conversation, March 1, 2000)

Conversations with Students

I recorded conversations with the students but I wanted to avoid formal interview situations with such young children. For one set of conversations, I spread the classroom photographs on the table. I asked groups of four children to talk about the photographs. For example, I pointed out to Raymond that his drawing (below) was similar to the photograph of story corner, printed at the beginning of this section. He agreed.

It is, because I copied that kind of. I didn't put all the numbers in the calendar. And (pointing to the card in the teacher's hand) that's a bug. And that's the hundred chart that goes all the way to one hundred but I didn't go all the way to one hundred. And that's pennies, little pennies (on the chalkboard). I wrote the word "Library" in that little square over there because the day before that it was going to be library day. (I asked - What was he doing with the picture of the beetles?) He's talking about them. He always talks about one and the ones he talked about are on the wall. (Raymond, taped conversation, January 12, 2000)

The children did not comment on the fact that people were not shown in the photographs. These conversations revealed the children's view of classroom life, describing, for example, the coat hooks, the insects, the reading activities, songs, poems and story corner. They talked about events such as assemblies, lining up for gym and music, special days and class routines.

Harper (1998) described the "photo elicitation interview" in which the "interview/discussion is stimulated and guided by images" (p. 145). The photographer, who created the photos, suddenly realizes "that he or she knows little or nothing about the cultural information contained in the image." Those who live in the pictured world may know it differently than does the photographer. During these conversations, the "researcher becomes a listener…" (p. 145). While he did not describe this for interviews with children, I found my version of this method to be worthwhile with children. They easily talked about their classroom while looking at the photographs.

For a different set of conversations I worked with groups of four children in another room. This time I asked them to cut pictures from magazines that showed their teacher in some way. They glued them onto a piece of construction paper to create a collage. I wanted to see how they would describe their teacher while searching for pictures. For example, Jeff cut out a graphic of a cloud with falling raindrops.

This cloud reminds me of Mr. Thompson because his tarantula died on the fourteenth of February. He was very sad when the spider died. Humungus sad. (Jeff, taped conversation, February 22, 2000)

In these conversations the children described their teacher's moods (such as when his spider died), his jokes, family members, appearance and teaching strategies.

Tape to Text

Immediately following each meeting, I listened to the tape and wrote what I called "tape notes". I timed the tape and wrote short summaries of each piece of the conversation. For example, the notes for the conversation with Melanie, state her name, the date and the number of the tape. When I listened I noted the time – this tape started at 1:15, so 1:23 below indicates this segment was 8 minutes into the conversation.

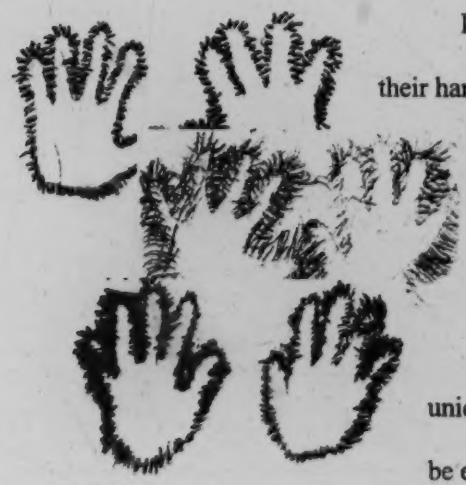
1:23 Peter
- *we met in the staff room*
- *we appreciated the fact that we had a few men because they gave a different perspective*

(tape notes, March 1, 2000)

I did not write complete transcriptions. As I wrote this dissertation, I was able to find the relevant sections of the tapes quickly and then I transcribed that section. As a result, I listened to all the tapes several times and know them well. At this time I took a staff list, and class list, and changed all names.

Student Writing and Drawing

While I was not permitted to take photographs of children's faces, I was permitted to keep children's work. I sent a letter home to all parents explaining my presence in the classroom and most parents signed a form, giving me their consent to keep their child's work. I did not collect any drawings or writing from those who did not return consent forms. In addition, I asked each child for permission before I kept any work. On several occasions I asked the class to write about/draw their teachers, or to write about/ draw classroom life.



I directed one art activity. Each child traced their hands and then colored around the outlines with crayons, using short lines, like short flower petals. I used this activity when I taught grade one and I knew its effectiveness. The resulting hand pictures represent each child's uniqueness. The children's personalities seem to be evident in their work (left).

I kept their original drawings and photocopied the page when they wrote in a school notebook. All their samples are held in a file in my cabinet at home.

When I look at the drawing The Line Up (right), I see Mr. Thompson and his grade one class lining up after their morning recess, all wearing smiles on their faces. He escorted them inside and they followed. I stood outside several mornings during recess, helping one child unwrap his snack, reminding another to throw the orange peel in the garbage can and ensuring they all lined up when called. I know the children in this line.

.....!

Ring the bell!
Blow the whistle!
Flick the lights!
"Line up! Line up! Line up!"
Watching them,
I suddenly realize
I have spent much of my life
Looking for lines to stand in,
Or avoid.

Burton drew this picture at my request then I "collected" this as "data". He drew himself in line but captured *my view* from my position, standing outside the line. Thus when I look at this drawing I remember myself on the playground, watching them line up to return to the classroom for math. I also remember the child, a talkative boy who enjoyed school. He drew the picture slowly and carefully and handed it in to me last. I now possess this drawing, adding it to the text in this dissertation.

Many of the drawings, like The Line Up, represent an aspect of actual classroom experience, and the children often interpreted their drawings to me as they handed them

in. I wrote occasional notes on the backs of the drawings. While the drawings depict their actual classroom, they also utilize symbols of school which we would recognize in our culture, such as desks, chairs, chalkboards, notes on the chalkboard, the teacher holding a pointer and children lining up.

I use both words "drawing" and "writing" because these children were in grade one. During their grade one year, they wrote nearly everyday in their journals, and the teacher often modeled story writing when the children sat in story corner. He wrote on the chalkboard or on large chart paper. He stapled chart paper to make a large journal and wrote in this journal once a week. As he wrote, he talked about his process, thinking out loud. In the fall all children drew pictures, and some added letters or words. As the year progressed, more and more children added words and sentences.

By including children's work in this dissertation, I hope to "provide a sense of particularity that abstractions cannot render. We come to see the place, to know each individual character" (Eisner, 1997, p. 8). Readers will meet the individuals through their art, and will know these individual students live. They are real. The children are included through their drawings since this dissertation cannot print photographs of their faces.

As I write this I take their drawings out of the file and place them on the desk before me. In many ways I find the drawings "spooky". The children talked while they worked, their hands touched the papers and held the crayons. They brought their daily experiences to the drawings. To me, these are much closer to the life of this classroom than are glossy

Fresh Preserves

faceless photos
crayon drawings
may contain
traces of bodies
traces of spirit

photographs. To me, the drawings hold traces of the spirits of the children. Yet, I have permission to copy these and place them in this paper, without fear.

I have photographs with no bodies. I have paragraphs and drawings with bodies and spirit. In educational research, we usually do not discuss the body or spirit, we discuss the development of the mind. Mind and body are kept separate.

In this study of a male elementary teacher and the shaping of his identity, I saw how difficult it is to live this split existence. By discussing the shaping of one teacher, it became obvious to me that Peter Thompson cannot live in the classroom as if the bodies do not exist. This research may be threatening, even dangerous, because this acknowledges that bodies exist and we come together in small rooms in public buildings. Here, I am attempting to write about a male elementary teacher, at the same time pretending the male does not bring his body to the school. As long as we cannot see the individuals involved, educational research, like teaching and learning, can carry on.

Research studies and official curriculum documents, seem to pretend children are not present, and the documents ignore the influence of their bodies on learning. Their bodies do not often belong in research data. In this study, about children and an adult male, the bodies are present and active. Simultaneously, I must write about them in ways that conceal their bodies, and leave merely their traces.

Other Documents

Along the way I collected other documents from the school. I picked up school newsletters and notices. I took photographs of Peter's poster of classroom rules and photocopied the school expectations from the student's agenda book. I received a small

number of Valentines cards from children in the class, two stories written by Peter and a thank you note from the principal.

From Field texts to Research texts

It is now June 2000. I am no longer visiting the classroom but I am at home writing this. I spread the photographs, children's work, field notes, journals and the cassette tapes on my desk while I work at the computer. I keep my small tape recorder plugged in so I can quickly insert a tape to listen.

This thesis does not spring up unannounced at the moment I sit here. Over the past two years I prepared for this moment.

While taking Dr. Doug Aoki's course, The Sociology of the Body, (referred to on page 43), I completed a pilot study in the school. I began by listening to the four men on staff, as they talked about their experiences as teachers. As one requirement for our research project, Dr. Aoki asked us to include a visual image, to integrate an image of bodies in our presentation. I decided to work with children and cameras. I asked one teacher of older children if I could work with his students. I met the class, showed my journals, and talked about photographs and writing. I gave the class two disposable cameras and asked the students to each take two photographs of classroom life. This took a week as they needed to take turns with the cameras. After I developed the film, I asked them to write about their photographs. As they wrote, I met with each child and asked them to talk about their photographs. This, then, became a class writing activity.

The photographs became part of my paper for that course. The parents in this school had previously signed media release forms, and the paper was unpublished, so the principal agreed to this project. The photographs have since been destroyed.

It was during this time that I began to think about using photographs as data, as well as using photographs to represent the research. I was also thinking about collage as a metaphor for research, as well as seeing collage as research. It also helped me think about using photographs and constructing a collage while taping conversations with the grade one children. I saw how the children's photographs informed their own writing and our discussions about classroom life. I saw how the photographs informed the discussions with Dr. Aoki. By looking at a male teacher sitting beside a child, for example, we could "read" unseen or unnoticed aspects of school life. They made the ordinary seem strange. It was because of these experiences that I went to the school district hoping to involve children and cameras in this research.

All of this prompted my thinking about "arts-based research" and alternative forms of data representation. I attended arts-based research sessions at conferences in Edmonton, Montreal and New Orleans. In addition, a revised version of the paper I wrote for Dr. Aoki's course became a section in my proposal. When I began writing this dissertation in June 2000, I looked at the photograph of the story corner, without images of the children and their teacher, and this inspired my writing.

I prepared for two conference presentations, International Conference for Teacher Researchers, (ICTR), in Baton Rouge, April 2000, and Canadian Society for Studies in Education, (CSSE), in Edmonton, May 2000. During my weekly conversations with Dr. Clandinin, my advisor, we often returned to a small number of stories from the field texts. These stories came into our conversations repeatedly. I began to call them strong stories.

These stories are strong because they are rich with meaning for me. These stories seem to demand my attention. They provide substance for discussion. They link with

numerous dilemmas. When I discussed these with Peter, they resonated for him. These stories invoked his passion, his words became emotional, intense. He would express his anger, frustration, concerns or worries. These are the stories that "clicked a switch" in Peter. Once, after an intense conversation, he apologized for becoming so emotional. These stories linked or connected our other conversations and thoughts.

When thinking about the ICTR presentation, Dr. Clandinin suggested I choose one of the strong stories and "play it out". I chose a story I called The Reluctant Superhero. I prepared overheads laying short excerpts from conversations and two children's drawings side by side. I read a poem in which I reorganized Peter's own words from a conversation transcript. In this way, I experimented with the presentation as well as the topic.

The discussion with the audience of ICTR focused on the topic, teachers as superheroes, and they raised questions, ideas and reactions for me to consider. I saw that these "strong stories" are strong for others as well as for Peter and me.

After the conference, my advisor and I discussed the paper for CSSE. She suggested that I try laying three stories side by side.

I taped an envelop in my journal and placed pieces of paper, representing the strong stories, inside the envelop. I removed the pieces and placed them beside each other on the desk as I wrote in my journal. In this way I chose three stories, "The Line up", "Mandy's Wet Underpants" and "He's our Friend" and wrote the paper.

The presentations for the two conferences provided me with opportunities to analyze the data. When I returned from this conference, I began to develop those stories. I split the CSSE paper into three separate files and developed each into the following

sections. Each morning I turned on the computer, loaded three files and read them. Then I began revising, adding, deleting, cutting and pasting. I wrote most of the poems while writing this text.

However, this is a linear dissertation, and after a few days of writing I needed to commit to an order. I needed to know which parts would be come first. This was when I knew I was moving from field texts to research texts. I became aware of the final product and the audience. This is no longer only for my eyes. In some ways this saddened me, because it marked what I saw as the beginning of the end of this research project.

I decided to present the strong stories in the following order. The stories, "Our Men are Different", and "This School is a Sacred Place", describe the school context. At least one aspect of these stories entered every conversation with staff members. In this place, these were two powerful school stories. By telling them first I tell what seemed important to everyone in this school. After that, the third story, "The Reluctant Superhero", tells various versions of Peter's story.

Through these stories I raise several "wonders" about Peter and his shaping. I also wonder about my own shaping as a teacher and researcher. These three stories, then, provide the background on which to lay the other stories.

Thinking about this dissertation as a collage, I lay side by side my journal entries, field notes, photographs, students' work, discussions on tape, other research, poetry and my thoughts while writing. As I worked out drafts of collages on my desk, I thought about what I was trying to say. Collage is not just a metaphor for this research, but the research is expressed metaphorically in collage. I literally placed a large white piece of construction paper on the desk and spread out the possible photos and words, shifting

them around, then put them away to return to the computer. At that moment in time, the collages were unglued but as my ideas developed, the collages became permanent.

Now I see the three strong stories as the background of the collage, like a triptych, which is a set of three panels, or pieces of art, mounted side by side. Later I will add another layer of stories over the three strong stories, "Mandy's Wet Underpants" and "Valentines Cards Carry So Many Messages". These two stories are placed over top of the background stories, becoming part of the collage, providing multiple interpretations.

I wrote the school stories in the past tense, to remind myself that I am no longer in that place. Much of this conversation, which I am writing in June and July 2000, (and rewriting during the year 2001) is in the present tense. These thoughts are written in standard format, double-spaced, 12 point, Times New Roman font. All excerpts from journals or field notes are placed inside a shaded text box. Poems are placed inside an unshaded text box. Excerpts from taped conversations are represented by the single spaced italic Times New Roman font.

Now I am ready to begin. I have gathered my materials and am prepared to create the fifth collage.

Part Two: The Fifth Collage - A Triptych

4. The first panel: Our Men are Different

I learned that other men were part of my research very early in my time at the school. During recess one morning in September, Lorelei, a staff member, talked to me about the men on the staff of Eastside Elementary School. She came to me, unexpectedly, with a story I couldn't forget. Her words caught my attention and I knew I needed to ask her about this later. I responded immediately to her story because I had recently written in my proposal about men as The Big Bad Wolf. In her words, the teachers who were on this staff a few years ago were storied as the Big Bad Wolf, and at the same time, she provided a counter-story to the one told in this school now. Only people who had been on staff for a longer period of time knew this story, which separated a "previous time" in this school from "the present time". In addition, she showed me that while I was here to discuss Peter Thompson, and ethically have permission to do so, conversations would quickly slip and slide away from him.

> Lorelei said to me at recess: the men on this staff are "new men". They get along with their wives, treat them with respect, love their children. Previously, the men who were here, one said to a teacher "I wouldn't team teach with you but I'd fuck you in the parking lot." We were outside at recess. She was so emotional as she spoke – her admiration for these men – her anger and disgust for the men who were here before. I will get back to this in our conversation. Field notes, September 2, 1999

With Lorelei's story in my mind, I noticed that other men frequently "slipped into" many of the conversations around the school. For example, another staff member, Cassandra, included all three of the men on staff in her conversation. She began by talking about Peter.

He's got a few years under his belt, and I think he has a real nice reputation with the parents and the students of the school. I don't see the students viewing him in any

different way because he's a grade one or two teacher and he's a male, because we have a nice group of – you know – lots of men on staff. That sets us apart too because not all elementary schools have that many men. (Cassandra, taped conversation, October 14, 1999)

In this conversation, Cassandra thought that the students do not view Peter in any different way, because they frequently saw men teachers. However, she wondered if the presence of men made this school unique. Later in the same conversation, she referred to both the fathers of the students and the men on staff in the same statement.

When you think of the kids in our school they have a lot of different men in their lives, some of those moms have a lot of new boyfriends, that move in, over the years. I think having stable men in the school – teachers – give them some stability. Some of them have no men but some have too many, and there's not a lot of staying power sometimes. (Cassandra, taped conversation, October 14, 1999)

Many of the conversations went like this and, as a result, the tapes are filled with references to other men.

In addition, I heard one word repeatedly: different. Men bring a different perspective, a different approach to things, a different level of humor. I heard that the men on this staff were different from other men. Lorelei gave me these distinctions and I called this story "Our Men are Different".

I struggled with writing about this. I felt it was important but did not know how to begin. I listened again to some of the tapes. I looked through my notes and transcribed relevant sections of the conversations. As I looked at the transcribed conversations, I decided to clip selected phrases and place them on another page.

The words on the next page were chosen from the taped conversations with several staff members. Their order has been rearranged and conversations blended together. By placing these on one page, I could see that "our men are different" in more ways than one.

There's so few men

The men in this building before:
weren't clean, well groomed, or respectful,
they were volatile, emotional, traditional, macho and sexist,
to the point of crossing the line
from being somewhat humorous to being blatantly harassing.
"I'd never want to team teach with you but I'd fuck you in the parking lot,"
and one teacher left fingerprints on a girl's arm for 45 minutes,
another screaming down the hall "this kid's not showing me any respect".

The men on staff now:
well groomed, fit, cheerful, gentle, still firm, funny,
respectful of their wives, active fathers, adore their own children,
see the wider spectrum of possibilities for themselves,
get along really well with everybody,
sit with us, they are part of us, we do things together.
and I wouldn't hesitate to put my own kids in any of their classes.

Some of the children have no men but some have too many.
I want the children to see that a male doesn't have to be
loud, yelling, screaming, not paying attention, cuff you on the head.
He can be a really warm, caring person.
If they come from a bad home where men are dirt,
they need to see men are not like that, they are good people.

Very very seldom would that happen where my husband would sit down
and listen to my children read. Wouldn't happen. Homework - wouldn't happen.

I like having the men around because it's another point of view.
the children get a different perspective.
Men bring a whole different approach to things,
It's fun, and you can joke, you get a different level of humor.
Having men on staff changes the way women behave,
they make life interesting, you know.

I like men who have feminine qualities.
A really good friend of mine has a lot of feminine qualities,
and I mean that in absolutely the best way possible,
he doesn't watch sports and he likes the ballet, that sort of thing.

There's such a difference between men and women,
with women it's like talking to yourself.
You need the men on staff.

There are so few men and you need the men. They bring a different perspective. From that first conversation on the playground, through many conversations during the year, I heard this repeatedly. These conversations linked together to become a strong story. I had hoped to avoid these comparisons. I had hoped to talk about this specific teacher without slipping into generalizations about men, or about male teachers.

By calling this "Our Men are Different", I hope to represent the notion that the teachers claimed the men on staff as "our men", not merely "the men". In addition, people told me that the men in this school were different from: the "bad men" previously on staff, the students' fathers, their husbands, "typical men", and finally, the men were different from women.

Our men are different from previous men

There was one conversation when I blatantly asked about other men. I met with Lorelei, a member of the administrative team, in a local restaurant in October. The tape is filled with the sounds of dishes clattering and people talking. We enjoyed ourselves.

I began the conversation by reminding her that she had spoken to me very briefly at recess in September. I asked her to tell me more about the men who were here before.

One of best places to start, when I met you at recess one day, you said something about this group of men are new men or modern men or something like that, compared to these others who were here before and I thought here's a story. I thought maybe you could explain what it was. (Garry, taped conversation, October 15, 1999)

She had been assigned to this school several years ago, and arrived at a time when the school was known in the system as a "difficult school". In those days, I heard frequently, substitute teachers often left at noon and refused to come back. Students

exhibited outrageous behaviours, and many teachers were incompetent. The men she described were on the staff when she arrived.

The men who were here before, had different value systems. They thought of relationships – especially work relationships – in different ways. They thought of their maleness in different ways, they were very traditional, macho and sexist, to the point of crossing the line from being somewhat humorous to being blatantly harassing. And that was considered to be acceptable.

The one comment was, at the coffee pot in the staff room, I'd never want to team teach with you but I'd fuck you in the parking lot. And comments about breasts or legs. (Lorelei, taped conversation, October 15, 1999)

The comment was made at the coffee pot in the staff room, a place that was referred to as a special place for teachers. In the telling of the story, the place was important. The staff room was considered to be a gathering place, a special place. This violation of the teacher also violated the place.

In addition, it was clear to her, that "I'd never want to team teach with you" was a personal and professional rejection. In many elementary schools, team teaching is highly valued, so teaming together is cherished. If a woman said "I'd never want to team teach with you", other issues would be at play, but in this statement, rejection of the relationship is at play. In this light, "I'd fuck you in the parking lot" was a physical and emotional threat, not an offer. More than that, it was a violation of notions such as collegiality, community building, school-as-family, men and women as equals.

She went on to say that the principal of the time supported their comments about women, and made remarks about female administrators in the system. I wondered how the men behaved with the children.

One particular teacher – had some difficulties – and got to the point where he was man-handling children and leaving marks on them, one time leaving fingerprints on a girl's arm for 45 minutes, and never ever had a letter or conversation, nothing (with the principal). So some of the men were really way over what would be acceptable

boundaries – screaming down the hall "this kid's not showing me any respect", that kind of thing. There just so happened to be a number of men on the staff at that time who had a different sort of image. (Lorelei, taped conversation, October 15, 1999)

Cassandra, who had been on staff during this time, discussed these men in her conversation. She agreed with Lorelei's assessment of the situation.

We had some men on staff, it was so bad, and this is the truth. One man on the staff was this close to being charged with sexual harassment, by a group of teachers. The administrator convinced the women not to go ahead with it, the women got a little frightened because the administrator was not on side. And so it was forgotten. Another male had a nervous breakdown. This man, for whatever reason, didn't get the help he should have from the administrator and the school board. He was taken out of the school in the spring only to be placed back here in our same school the following year. There was one man who came dressed, or undressed as the case may be, he had to be spoken to about the way he dressed – the shorts he wore, dirty t-shirts, hygiene was a big problem. (Cassandra, taped conversation, October 14, 2000)

The school was so sick that a possible harassment charge was not supported by the principal and was "forgotten". Another teacher had a nervous breakdown and another came to school wearing dirty and inappropriate clothes.

A third staff member did not speak of these men directly, but after the previous two conversations, I believe she referred to them when she made a similar comparison. In my view, when a teacher says she would place her own children with a colleague, it is the ultimate statement of trust.

The men we have on staff now are very caring, empathetic, very good with kids and I wouldn't hesitate to put my own kids in any of their classes. I worked with a couple of other men, on staff, that if I had a child that would have gone into that class I would have pulled them. (Natalia, taped conversation, January 6, 2000)

A new principal arrived about five years ago. He came with a mission to turn the school around, and, according to everyone on staff, he did. Because of the radical changes brought about by the new principal, several staff members, including Peter and the other men, were part of the changes. They saw themselves as the group who turned

the school around. They created a school that works for kids. A year ago that principal retired and Adelina replaced him. Lorelei remained on staff through these three changes in the administrative team and supported the two most recent principals as they brought renewal to the school.

She described the men now on this staff.

They talk about their wives with respect and admiration and true caring and they share that all the time. They truly adore their own children, and they are very active fathers, all of them, they are truly committed to family. And they do the things that – I would say, the roles have expanded for men and women – and so when Cameron (one of the men on staff) has had a tough day (at school) he goes home and bakes cookies with his kids and then goes outside and plays with them. They (the men) see the wider spectrum of possibilities for themselves and for their own kids.

They have high expectations for their students, whether male or female, they are very open and caring and understanding, they don't seek each other out like a little clique. It's very comfortable in the staff room, the bantering that goes back and forth it doesn't matter people get teased equally. (Lorelei, taped conversation, October 15, 1999)

The story of "Our men are different from previous men" revealed much about this school and about the context shaping Peter Thompson.

This story described acceptable behaviours for all teachers, whether male or female. Obviously women teachers should not leave marks on a child's arm, nor should they make sexist or racist statements in class. But because the story compared the two groups of men, it clearly described acceptable behaviours for male teachers.

"Our men" were acceptable because they loved their wives and children, were caring and understanding, and, as one teacher said, they were "very good with kids and I wouldn't hesitate to put my own kids in any of their classes."

They were not only good teachers, but were viewed as Good People, with high moral values. The previous men were not only bad teachers but were viewed as Bad

People, with unacceptable moral values. The previous men were portrayed as the Big Bad Wolf.

As the story of Little Red Riding Hood progresses, we are afraid for her, because we know the Big Bad Wolf's intentions are not honorable. We know that he is pretending to be nice to win her trust, we know that he ran ahead to Grandma's house to set a trap. Red Riding Hood is innocent and unknowing. She does not know what is going on, but as readers, we know. In schools we view children as innocent, like Red Riding Hood, and thus the adults must be trustworthy. The previous men broke the sacred trust of the school, with the comments made to or about women in the staff room, and actions towards children. By becoming elementary teachers, they were donning Grandma's clothes, pretending to be someone people could trust. Men who teach elementary children must be trusted, because young children are placed in their classrooms. The men now in this school demonstrated their trustworthiness by loving their own wives and children, by joining teachers in the staff room, by building positive relationships with children.

The men currently in this school embodied certain moral qualities, and as a result, were highly valued by the women on staff. Shirley, for example, told me she liked the men on this staff because:

> *they are sociable, they are friendly, they have a sense of humor, they get along really well with everybody, they sit with us, they don't sit by themselves, they are part of us... (Shirley, January 12, 2000).*

She liked the men because they sat in the staff room without harassing the women, they cracked jokes that everyone could enjoy, and they joined the group and became "part of us".

The story of "Our men are different from previous men", also showed me how teachers are judged by others in the school. When I asked staff member Natalia how she knew a male teacher was sexist, she replied "if someone is on the sexist side you see it in their comments. Sometimes in the way they approach you as a teaching partner" (taped conversation, January 6, 2000). The teachers judged the previous men by their words and actions, as teachers and as men. While this may seem obvious, the rules for judging words and actions seem hazy and unwritten, particularly for male teachers. While teachers can "break the rules" without knowing, I think "male teachers" have a different set of rules.

The story of "Our men are different from previous men" showed me that my behaviours have always been watched and judged by others. While I have always known, I have also not known. I did not realize until this year, as I heard how closely the staff watched the men on staff, how closely others have watched me. Others watch my teaching abilities, but also I am watched for my behaviours as a man.

Our men are different from the dads

During my first meeting with Peter, he told me about Peggy, the mother of two children who have been students in Peter's class. In his words, when she came to the school to register Donny in grade one, she requested Mr. Thompson for his teacher. She later told Peter why she wanted Donny in his class.

She told me explicitly the reason was because she needed her son to have a stable male figure in his life. The father was not stable, they were fighting all the time and she didn't want her son to see that males only fight, that there were good men out there. So she specifically asked for him to be placed in my class and throughout the year she said "he's responded so well to you". I don't know if it is because I am a man, but with him I had tremendous success, (Peter, taped conversation, Nov 13, 1998)

She hoped that Peter would become a stable male in Donny's life. In Peter's version of the story, the child's father was not stable, and the parents had been fighting. Peggy wanted her son to see that "there were good men out there". This specific family's story is not unique. Many teachers compared the men on staff to the children's fathers. As I read these I found the perceptions about the children's fathers startling. Again, the men on staff presented a different standard, which became valued as a better standard.

When Lorelei compared "our men" with the "previous men", she said that the previous men "reflected the kind of men they (the children) live with." Our men were preferable, because they provided a model that some children might not see otherwise.

When we talk about men as role models, I have to say ... the men in this building weren't clean, well groomed, they weren't respectful, they were volatile and emotional which reflected the kind of men the children lived with. Now the children see men who are well groomed, fit, cheerful, gentle, still firm, funny, use communication as ways to deal with problem solving and have intellectual zest for what they are doing. (Lorelei, October 15, 1999)

Cassandra, the staff member quoted earlier, told me about her own daughter's relationship with her father after their separation. After her husband moved out, she told me that her daughter "missed him terribly". Her thoughts turned to the students in her class.

When you think of the kids in our school they have a lot of different men in their lives, some of those moms have a lot of new boy friends, that move in, over the years. I think having stable men in the school – teachers – gives them some stability. Some of them (the students) have no men but some have too many, and there's not a lot staying power sometimes. (Cassandra, taped conversation, October 4, 1999)

Cassandra did not have several boyfriends after her marriage ended, but she was aware of the stress the break up had on her own daughter. In school, she heard about the relationships of some of the parents, and observed that students experienced instability in

their lives. She hoped that the men at school provided stability in an unstable world. I often heard that this school provided stability. While the world seems more and more unstable, the teachers hoped the school provided a stable, secure and unchanging environment.

I learned from the school principal that in one school year, two thirds of the students move in or out, so the staff focuses on building community relationships in the classroom and meeting the emotional needs of students and their families. A part time school psychologist and full time resource teacher assist by testing children, meeting with parents, providing limited classroom support and helping teachers write Individual Program Plans. They also coordinate connections to several community agencies. English as a Second Language assistants work with new Canadians in each classroom. Other classroom assistants are provided through other funding sources.

All these stresses in the lives of families affect the students. Complex families are living complex lives. However, the point here is that Cassandra's perception is that fathers are unstable and our men are stable.

In a conversation with Shirley, another staff member, she called Peter a good role model for the children. When I asked her to explain what she meant, she compared Peter to her perception of some fathers.

When I look at some of the kids we have here, they don't know who their dad is, if it is their dad, the kids don't have any interaction with him. And if it is, it's that talk down sort of thing. It's good for them to see somebody, and women do this as well - the positive model - but to see a male - Peter looks at them, listens to them, he's not yelling, he's talking, he's listening. For kids to have that at that young age is really important... They either don't have a dad, or there's a dad, or some guy, and there's not always a positive role model. (Shirley, taped conversation, January 20, 2000)

In Shirley's view, Peter showed the children positive ways to relate. Even though he was a man, he looked at them, and listened to them. Other teachers expressed similar thoughts. They often said "many of the dads are fine," or "I know this is a generalization but...". In their experience many mothers were like Peggy, who raised the children, maintained custody and kept the family together. Most often the single parents were mothers. This is not a debate about whether or not dads were involved with their children, but rather the point is that the teachers' perceptions were clear. Their perceptions about the fathers guided their perceptions about the male teachers. Our men provided stable male role models, because the fathers were absent, unstable or less acceptable.

One of the teachers did not refer to the dads in this school, but to dads in general. This teacher liked seeing a man who did not follow the cool and aloof stereotype for male behaviour.

It's nice to see a man that's warm and caring. There are so many men that are cool and aloof particularly with their children. I know, in many aspects it's because a man thinks if he's soft and gentle towards his son, his son will grow up to be a sissy, he won't be the macho type that he's expecting him to be. So they do all these kind of male things, the things that will make him rough and tough rather than being gentle with them. (Melanie, taped conversation, March 1, 2000)

In other conversations, fathers were referred to as the family disciplinarian. The expectation was expressed that children listened to their fathers. Janice, a staff member, talked about the ways her own children respond to her husband. We had been discussing the voices of the men on staff, compared to the voices of the women.

But talking about voice, my husband's voice is lower and deeper and I can say something and people don't really move, the boys will kind of "Ya, mom I'll do that." He will say "when are you going to do it?" And they will say "Five minutes, Dad." That's how it happens. And sometimes maybe they hear mom's voice too much. Maybe we don't sound very authoritative, although I don't want to sound authoritative all the time. (Janice, taped conversation, January 12, 2000)

When she said "maybe we don't sound very authoritative," she was referring to mothers and women teachers. She immediately added that she did not want to sound authoritative all the time. She seemed to think of authoritative in a negative way, or perhaps a male way, and she does not want to relate to children in that way all the time. While this view of a father seems more positive than the previously stated views, it placed men in a disciplinarian role.

The men on staff also met with me to discuss Peter. They did not state that they were glad to see him because the children needed more father figures, nor did they seem to need more help being father figures in this school. They did not make any references to the fathers in the neighborhood. While they recognized Peter's talents as a teacher, they viewed him as a friend and colleague.

When I was called a "father figure" in the newspaper article cited earlier, (Spearman, 1978), no one asked what kind of father figure I presented. Only "good fathers" were imagined. At Eastside Elementary School, the staff seemed to decide which kind of father figure was preferable for children. This realization makes me wonder how schools and teachers decided we had the right to declare which fathers are deficient. This makes me wonder how schools know which is a good model and which is a bad model. Perhaps I have provided a negative role model all along, when viewed from other perspectives.

I began to see contradictions underlying the term "father figure". Perhaps educators could call a teacher a parent figure. Perhaps we can look for other terminology, rather than family terminology, to describe teachers. By calling me a father figure, the author of the article invoked the traditional heterosexual model of maleness. Men who

want to be close to young children must be father-like. If they are not father-like, they might be dangerous. Schools maintain a traditional family model by referring to teachers as parents.

I did not hear any comments about teachers being good "mother figures" to compensate for those in the neighborhood who might be regarded as poor mothers. Women teachers are so common, and so ordinary, that they are already like mothers. No one thinks to call them mother figures. I don't think I have ever heard the term "mother figure" to describe an elementary teacher. But it is taken for granted that the men provide a "father figure."

When I consider my story as a teacher, I was viewed as a father figure who experienced success as an elementary teacher. Yet, as I entered this research two years ago I knew that something deep down bothered me about my place in schools. I could not put a finger on it. I wanted to figure out the complexity of being a man who worked with young children. Something about father figure and role model is too simplistic, yet it is the first thing many people say about male elementary teachers. I am beginning to figure out this complexity, I am beginning to understand what bothered me.

As I write this I wonder how naming Peter a father figure shapes his identity as a teacher. I wonder how various images of fathers influence his actions in the classroom.

Our men are different from our husbands

While completing coursework in my Ph.D. program, I visited Eastside Elementary to carry out a pilot project. I met with the four men who were on staff at that time. We met as a group so I could hear their experiences as men who teach elementary

school. I wanted to confirm my own experiences, and the experiences reported by other researchers (Allan, 1993; Boyle, 1997; King 1998; Sargent, 2000 and others) about male elementary teachers. At the time I was looking for a focus on the topic and had not started to write my proposal.

I met with all four in a classroom after school and listened as they talked for about an hour. I recorded the conversation. We were discussing the reactions of others to the men's career choice when Peter described occasions when he told women he taught grade one.

> *...They just think "Boy could you come talk to my husband," because, you know, kind of the idea that because I'm an elementary teacher I'm nurturing or patient or I've got some quality that... more than one woman has said "Boy, you should come talk to my husband." (Peter, taped conversation, November 12, 1998)*

I have experienced this as well, and I met women who said "you should talk to my husband". Before I began this research I was aware of these comparisons.

During this research, I heard occasional comments directed to the men, indicating that husbands could learn a thing or two from Our Men. For example, it was common knowledge that Cameron, one of the men on staff, made the lunches for his family every day. One day as Roberta, one of the teachers, pulled her lunch from the fridge, she stated that she told her husband that Cameron makes all the lunches for his family. Of course, her husband did not leap up to start making sandwiches, but I noticed the comment and cringed. I don't want to be compared to husbands, or become a source of friction at home.

Only one staff member made this kind of comment explicitly while talking to me.

Annette greatly admired Peter, saying that he was "a most amazing man". She described Peter's home life by comparing it to hers.

In my home, we have a very traditional relationship, I'm the mother I do this, my husband does this. You'd never see my husband do a dish if his life depended on it. I've heard Peter talk about his family and his wife, and just by watching him teach you can tell that what he is here, he is at home. (Annette, taped conversation, January 6, 2000)

She went on to talk about her own daughter's experiences in elementary school. With male teachers and male volunteers, her daughter experiences men reading with children, which she does not experience that at home.

That is something that in my home, that wouldn't happen. Very very seldom would that happen where my husband would sit down and listen to my children read. Wouldn't happen. Homework, wouldn't happen. But (with a male) in that role the children would have that experience reading with a male volunteer or teacher. What are my girls going to walk away with at the end of it all? I think about those things. I don't want them to walk away thinking men do this women do this. And yet in our role, and we've chosen that role in our relationship, that is acceptable. But for my girls I don't necessarily want that. (Annette, taped conversation, January 6, 2000)

She did not want her daughters to carry rigid ideas of roles for men and women, so she hoped the schools could provide other models. When I responded that this "puts a lot on the school", that it is a huge responsibility to place on the men in the schools, she agreed.

Always. The roles are changing and we are expecting the staff in a school to...model appropriate behaviour, good decision making, gentleness, caring, respect. Your kids are there (at school) for five, six, seven hours a day and they come home. They're with you (the parents) for maybe three or four hours and they're in bed. You can really see if you take a look at your kids, what their year is looking like and what their days are like and how their personalities are changing because of the roles the teachers are playing. (Annette, taped conversation, January 6, 2000)

As I heard comments like these I realized that many people still hold very high expectations for schools. Perhaps that is why we seem to hear such public dissatisfaction with public education – because, as a society, we continue to hold very high ideals.

One other staff member briefly referred to her husband. We were discussing the arts, and whether music is viewed as something women do, which might discourage boys from participating.

I tried to encourage my son to join the choir at his school and he had that idea that – it's also the father's influence too – my husband likes to kid around and he said "we had names for kids who join the glee club," and just kidding around but, you think it's over their head but – I think that had something to do with it too. (Leah, taped conversation, February 14, 2000)

The words of the father at home influenced the child's choices at school. While she knew many boys in Eastside Elementary School participated in choir, her own son did not attend choir at his school.

Later in the same conversation she went on to say that her children loved their male teachers. She thought their male teachers somehow made a difference in their lives.

Our men are different from "typical men"

Other men, typical men or stereotypical men, entered several conversations. It was often a device used to describe Peter, by describing what he is not, such as in this conversation when Jennifer said he is not "the typical macho male".

The kids here need somebody who is a male role model. Peter is sensitive. He cross-stitches. He's not the typical macho male. He shows his emotion and some men don't - they keep it bottled up. The little kids in this school need to know it's okay to be boys as well as to be upset and not bottle it up. The kids have somebody to bond to, to talk to. The young girls need a father figure as well. If they come from a bad home where men are sort of dirt, they need somebody to see men are not like that, they are good people. (Jennifer, taped conversation, February 2, 2000)

Melanie was the staff member who stated earlier that many men worry if they are soft towards their sons, they might make him a sissy. I then asked her if men such as

Peter, who work with young children, could be seen as sissies. She replied that she definitely did not see them as sissy-men.

You don't have to be loud and brazen and aggressive to be macho. You can be a man's man by being quiet and reserved and gentle. (Melanie, taped conversation, March1, 2000)

Later in the same conversation, when we talked about male nurses and male teachers, she added that

I don't think people should be slotted. They should be free to expand their horizons as they see fit, they're the ones that have to live the life and if they're living something to please someone else really they're wasting their life. (Melanie, taped conversation, March 1 2000)

In my conversation with Annette, who compared Peter to her husband, I asked if men who teach grade one are different than other men.

I think they are stronger, because they are having to prove themselves, in a way, past the expectations of what everybody has seen. I see our teachers of older children and some of the administration that have been male in my past experience and it is an automatic expectation that these men will have these roles. But the assumption is not there when we are looking at a male in a grade one position. (Annette, taped conversation, January 6, 2000)

Elaine, another staff member, when explaining why she liked Peter, stated her high regard for "feminine" traits. While she stated that "feminine" was not a good term for this, nevertheless, she used the term to describe Peter's admirable qualities.

I like men who have feminine qualities, what they call feminine qualities. A really good friend of mine I see as having a lot of feminine qualities, and I mean that in absolutely the best way possible... he doesn't watch sports and he likes the ballet, that sort of thing. I think I'm kind of drawn to Peter, because he has the feminine qualities that I like in a person. Some women have no feminine qualities whatsoever. I like the softer side in people, like the one that you can talk and have a good conversation, and you know they are caring people, Peter is caring, he really cares about his students. I like men who have that side of them that they are willing to let out... (Elaine, taped conversation, January 10, 2000)

In the eyes of these staff members, I see a negative view of "typical men." Typical men were described as loud, brazen, uncaring, aloof and insensitive. Feminine traits, such as showing caring, carrying on good conversations, interest in cross-stitching and ballet, were portrayed as desirable. Every time Peter was compared to "typical men" the comparison was positive for Peter. However, the statements painted a negative portrait of men.

Another view of men was expressed by the principal. She sounded more positive when she described "typical men", because she has found men easier to work with. As a principal, she experienced more difficulties dealing with women.

The differences come in my work as a principal mostly from women. Men tend to be much easier to work with. They can come in angry and state their case and you can work with them. Women are a whole other issue, and they are the ones who have difficulty with me as a leader. It makes it rather difficult but it's the women. Over time you learn as you go and I am better at dealing with them but I've never had a problem dealing with men. (Adelina, taped conversation, January 27, 2000)

Her comments brought out perceptions of differences between men and women, a topic I touch upon in the next section.

As I listened to conversations like these, I wondered how these perceptions of typical men shaped Peter. I wondered how men who were described as "not typical", continued to provide "male role models".

Our men are different from us

Nearly everyone told me that the men bring a different perspective. The statement became generalized and seemed to mean "a different perspective to education," but I began to think it meant a "different perspective from ours – the women". Many also said when there are more men, things are more balanced.

Melanie, quoted earlier, provided a clear example of this idea, when she said that "it was nice to see men coming on staff, and we appreciated the fact that we had a few men because it gave a different perspective to learning." I asked her to elaborate, to think of an example of Peter's different perspective.

One thing I've noticed, in the classroom, he's a great one about collecting these insects. There's no way I would ever play with insects. He shows them they don't have to be afraid of it and he'll let them walk on his hand and I remember one time bringing it over and asking 'do you want to see this' and I didn't particularly. But those kind of things that maybe a man would take an interest in, that he could discuss even more than a woman. Also, when he talks about the things he does with his own children. I've listened to how a man can be just as affectionate and enjoy his children as much as a woman. You can see the pride he has in those children and quite often will bring them into the school. (Melanie, taped conversation, March 1, 2000)

Jennifer, a beginning teacher, provided another example.

I'd like there to be more men in teaching – it's fun. With a whole bunch of women you don't get a different perspective on things. There such a difference between men and women, with women it's like talking to yourself. (Jennifer, taped conversation, February 2, 2000)

Because she recently attended university, I asked her whether the men in her elementary methods classes seemed to fit in, or whether they were seen as outsiders.

In university classes the men were more the insiders because there's few of them, and so everybody - not really latched on but – you know – sort of – we all became really good friends but more so with the guys, than the girls, (because) I found the women more cliquey, they had their group and that was it. (Jennifer, taped conversation, February 2, 2000)

She felt women were often "cliquey", and that men were not. She liked being with men, because "it's fun" and she wished there were more men teaching.

Corinna, another staff member, noticed that the men received more attention in the staff room, but saw that as positive or natural. Men were the minority and so their presence was valued. These particular men were special and well liked, so when one of them spoke up, others listened.

I think it's just natural that women tend to look - and maybe - give them more attention when they're talking, because – you know – to hear their stories – there's so few men. I'm sort of thinking, like fireflies flitting around some light, and they are the, sort of like, the light source. Three is not a lot, but I think it would be very different if they weren't here. (Corinna, taped conversation, February 28, 2000)

Three men were not many, but they made a difference. How would it be different if the men were not present?

I think there would be more cliques. Anytime you have those men there it breaks up the possibility of cliques. (Corinna, taped conversation, February 28, 2000)

At least two women expressed concern about the cliques. If women worked together without men, they might form cliques, or exclusive groups. In this school, the lack of exclusive groups was regarded as one of its positive characteristics.

She went on to describe the men's sense of humor, which could be bolder. While the previous men stepped over the line into harassment, these men were able to push the edges of propriety a little. Many told me informally that the men loved to laugh, that they were funny and lightened things up.

It's fun, and you can joke, you get a different level of humor, it's not necessarily appropriate humor, but you joke around. If it was all women you wouldn't make those jokes. The men are maybe a little bit bolder with their humor. (Corinna, taped conversation, February 28, 2000)

In my conversation with Catherine, another staff member, she stated that you need at least one or two men on staff, because they bring a different approach.

You need the men on staff, men bring a whole different approach to things, and I have worked on staffs where the only man on staff was the principal and it was all women. As soon as a man comes on staff, they bring a whole different view on things, a different approach to things, I think you need at least one or two men on staff. (Catherine, January 10, 2000)

I asked her to describe the differences. She hesitated at first as she thought about the question. She searched for a concrete example, which illustrated her idea.

Men are not so fussy, usually, and they are not nitpicky like women can get. Men don't care, they'll put up a display, but they're not as fussy, women will make sure the pictures just so, and the writing is just so and men will go 'thunk thunk thunk' the things are up and at least it's a display. But I think it's good, it gives you another side of the coin to look at. (Catherine, January 10, 2000)

By giving this example, Catherine provided a picture of women as the ones who are neat and tidy to a fault, and men who are less fussy, who get on with the job. Others told me that women tend to be "too fussy".

The principal also stated that you need men on staff of a high needs school. She thinks a mix of men and women provide balance.

In a high needs school you need a balance of male to female. I think that all of our work is built on relationships, every last thing you do is built on relationships. You get that more from a woman's perspective because we tend to work on a relationship basis – men can stand a bit aside from that – they still have the relationship but can stand a bit aside from that for whatever reason. I like to have that mix on a staff because there is that constant interplay. (Adelina, taped conversation, January 27, 2000)

In Adelina's view, the fact that men can be distant from relationships is positive. When you have men and women on staff, you have a constant interplay.

In one final example, Shauna, a teacher, described her view that men and women solve problems differently. She used the idea of a family to describe this.

I personally believe men and women solve problems differently and have different solutions. They look at problems differently and that's why I think two parents can solve a problem with their children, because you quite often have different experiences and so you see it in a different way and if you can share those experiences you can come out with a solution to the problem and I appreciate listening to other people's ways of solving problems. I do believe men see things differently and you get a rounder solution. It is much more balanced to have men and women on staff. It's unbalanced when you just have women. It's just, just natural isn't it? It makes things feel complete. (Shauna, taped conversation, January 11, 2000)

Balance, completeness, perspective, natural. It seemed to be common knowledge, or a folk wisdom (Allan, 1993), that the men brought a different perspective to the school. I heard this over and over. I could find few examples of the different perspective,

other than statements that supported a narrow view of maleness. For example, Peter's insect knowledge, the men's sense of humor, lack of fussiness and standing aside from relationships were given as examples of difference. While the men on staff were appreciated for being unlike typical men or previous men, they were still viewed as typical in certain ways.

In Eastside Elementary School, many believed that men and women are different. These differences affected the ways they teach. When I asked people to describe or explain the differences they often found it difficult to explain.

It has nothing to do with being a man or a woman

The men/women issue is a non-issue right now. The way we work together in the school, it doesn't matter if D's a man or M's a woman. The kinds of conversations we have are very similar – but they have nothing to do with being a man or a woman... They work as a team, it's a non-issue right now. (Lorelei, taped conversation, October 15, 1999)

Maybe that's why this school works so well, there isn't a lot of that. When I see Peter come through the office, I don't see him as a male teacher, I see him as a friend, a colleague, as someone I can trust just as I do anyone else. I don't see him as a male in that respect. (Annette, taped conversation, January 6, 2000)

Finally, covering over all of this, I heard strong statements that gender just didn't matter in this school. What really mattered was that everyone worked together, for the kids. The staff liked this school and liked each other, so gender did not matter. It was recognized that the children needed excellent teachers and that was always the first consideration.

The principal described effective teachers.

There are two things that are very basic to being successful in a school like this: one is the sense of never giving up, and the sense of having really high expectations for these children... You have to believe enough in children that we have a sense of

discipline, a sense of fairness but a sense of calmness and a sense of safety. (Adelina, January 27, 2000)

I asked Shirley to describe good teachers.

Somebody who really models. They are a good listener because they want their kids to be good listeners. They have good speaking skills because that's what they want the kids to develop. They want to make – they want to make the kids want to be here. They make things interesting so that requires energy. (Shirley, taped conversation, January 20, 2000)

These descriptions of good teachers exclude gender. The gender of the teachers was less important than the quality of the teacher. As "Our men are different from previous men" showed, any man would not do.

I wrote in my journal one day that I was not seeing anything. From day to day, the classroom activities from room to room were very similar, whether the teacher was a man or woman. In all rooms the students were reading and writing, completing math work, borrowing books from the library. The gender of teachers was not the subject of a bulletin board in the hallway.

As I think about Peter's shaping, this expression of indifference, or blindness to gender, is crucial. If gender does not matter, bodies do not matter. We could all just rub our brains together and get on with learning. However, the man brings his body to school, as do the students and other teachers. The expression of indifference results in silences, no one needs to talk about gender if it does not matter.

As I think about Peter's shaping, I think about the expectations and perceptions of his co-workers. (Parents' stories are not forgotten and will be included later.) If other teachers expect Peter to bring a different perspective, how does this shape his teaching? How do these perceptions shape his work in the classroom? How does he influence the contexts in which he works?

As I entered this research, I promised myself not to compare men and women, and I did not wish to become embroiled in impossible debate. However, I kept hearing that "Our men are different" and "These men make a difference". I saw that comparisons were inevitable. I decided to acknowledge the existence of this belief and place it here at the beginning of this work. It provides one of the strong stories to lay beside the others.

As I worked with this research, I realized that the story "Our Men are Different" is all the more powerful when placed beside the next strong story. These men were special *in this place*. Once they stepped through the doors into this school, they were inside a special place. They would not be quite so special, perhaps, if not for the school itself. They would not be so special, out in public places such as the shopping mall or the movies. They may not be quite so special at home with their families.

I began to think of this school as more than just a special place, I began to think of it as a sacred place.

5. The second panel: This School is a Sacred Place

When I see the boots lined up on the racks by the door I know that in Eastside Elementary School, order and cleanliness are valued. In every elementary school where I taught, children took their boots off at the door. The children in my classes brought "indoor shoes" to keep at school so they could change, leaving the dirt outside. The hallways were always gleaming. In many classrooms children and teachers sit on the floor for lessons, another reason for keeping the floors clean. With the rise in allergies among children, carpets must be kept free of dust and mold. We hear many explanations for removing boots at the door, always related to maintenance and cleanliness. It is an intriguing quirk of elementary school culture that is not repeated in secondary schools.

Every day, the children and adults stopped at the door of this school and removed their boots. Bob, one of Peter Thompson's students told me the reason.

Why do you take your boots off in the hall?

Because we might get the floors dirty and Mr. A (the custodian) would have to mop it. We keep the floor clean because it helps Mr. A.

How does it help you learn, how does it help you be a better student?

Because if it's not clean then you are a messy student, it helps you be cleaner. (Bob, taped conversation, February 2, 2000)

We take off our shoes when we enter a home. Shoes are often removed at the door of Holy Places. We show respect when we remove our shoes, we humble ourselves before God and leave the everyday world at the door as we enter God's presence. We honor the Holy Spirit.

In elementary schools, cleanliness is linked to learning success. Nice, neat, quiet little girls and boys are rewarded, and rude, dirty, noisy little girls and boys are punished. One of the previous men came to school wearing dirty clothes and hygiene was a problem. A teacher told me that Peggy, one of the parents, and her children, did not look like the other families because they looked middle class – they were blond, clean and cute.

> I've been thinking about school as sanctuary. Safe and caring. Teachers as models of compassion, caring, learning, learning/literacy as salvation. Clean place, clean language, clean thoughts, clean shoes inside, messy shoes outside.. Are these reasonable? Realistic, attainable? The culture outside the school is moving away from these values. The culture inside still models respect, community, caring. Calling teachers Mr. and not swearing in class equals what?
>
> Journal entry, February 16, 2000

Sacred, according to Webster (1988), is defined as "dedicated or set apart for the service or worship of a deity", "worthy of religious veneration", and "entitled to reverence and respect" (p. 1035). This building is not officially a church, set aside for worship, yet it seemed as if the building was "entitled to reverence and respect". During my stay, I began to think about this school as more than a special place – it seemed like a sacred place.

I heard that this school was a special place. During many conversations with staff, the phrase I heard repeatedly was "In *this* school…". It was always a positive statement, as the speaker described the school. I sometimes heard an emphasis on the word "*this*" and the speaker would point a finger to the floor, indicating the building we were now in. One variation was "In *this* building…"

I first heard this phrase in my first conversation with Peter on November 13, 1998. After graduation he had been hired for four months to replace a teacher on leave in

another school. He was the only man on staff and felt out of place. He compared that experience to his experience at Eastside Elementary School.

Now the people in this school are very very good. Um, the ladies don't – here you don't feel like you're the odd one out or that you are not a real man or that you're just a gentle guy – so it depends on the staff really. (Peter, taped conversation, November 13, 1998)

I subsequently heard about "this school" during taped conversations as well as during informal conversations in the hallways. I heard a powerful "school story" (Clandinin and Connelly, 1996), that seemed to be shared by everyone who spoke to me.

The school was indeed special – but what made it sacred?

<u>You can sit beside anyone in the staff room</u>

...you could sit beside anyone in the staff room at any time and have a conversation with them. The way our staff room is people don't have set spots. In some schools, and how it used to be here, people had their set spots, if you sat in somebody's chair, you were in trouble. (Corinna, taped conversation, February 28, 2000)

Several told me that you could sit beside anyone in the staff room. This staff room was a special place, and you could sit beside anyone, teacher or support staff, and no one had a personal chair. Everyone ate lunch together and enjoyed loud and inclusive conversations. Most Friday mornings someone brought snacks, such as muffins, and staff members came in for the treat. The staff room accommodated social occasions, such as baby showers, student teacher receptions, important announcements or special farewells. Staff meetings were held in this room. The staff regarded this as their room and they felt safe and secure.

I think it's a great school to be at. I think we're unique, I really do. Everybody gets along on staff, there's no little groups, you can sit beside anyone on the staff and feel comfortable. I think we're an "all for one, one for all" school. Everybody backs everybody else up, over and over and over again. You can go to anybody and ask for

units or do you have anything on this topic and there's nobody on staff who would say "no you can't have that." (Alisa, taped conversation, January 12, 2000

Alisa, the grade one teacher who was Peter's team partner, expressed the idea that the staff members were "unique", because everyone got along and supported each other. Harmony in the school was highly valued. As mentioned earlier, the lack of cliques was proof of their uniqueness. The story was clear that "in *this* school, we are special".

Shirley made remarks so similar to Alisa's that I could see the power of the school story. She talked about her sense of this community.

There's never been a clique in this school, we don't have any camps. People accept everybody for who they are, everybody sees the good in everybody. Everybody has their own little quirks, but it all just fits really really well. You can feel you can walk in the staff room and pretty well sit anywhere, and sit with anybody and chat away at lunch time. (Shirley, taped conversation, January, 12, 2000)

I asked her how this supportive school environment helped Peter as a new teacher.

It's been a really good environment for Peter, because I would think listening to him talk about his childhood, his growing up years, he talked about being the tall kid, being picked on, being the victim. He's arrived in a very safe place and he was able to grow and feel more confident being here that we have been able to be more nurturing for Peter. (Shirley, taped conversation, January 12, 2000)

This school was a "very safe place" for Peter. I heard over and over again that the teachers felt supported as part of a community. They often compared this school to others, by saying something like "you hear about other schools…" or "not like other schools…" often storying other schools as bad, or less desirable, places. These stories of other schools made this school all the more special, similar to the previous men, or typical men, demonstrating the value of the present men.

Annette, quoted earlier expressing high expectations for the influence of teachers on her daughters, talked about this school. She believed that people wanted to stay in this school because of the powerful family atmosphere and camaraderie.

This school is phenomenal, this school in my opinion is the most phenomenal school I've worked in. There is a community, there is a connectedness that is quite incredible. The support in this school is not gender orientated. Everybody is their own person and everybody is family... People are really reluctant to leave this building because of that camaraderie, that tells you something. (Annette, taped conversation, January 6, 2000)

She added that when she attended system meetings, other secretaries asked her what was going on at this school, because they heard such good things.

Melanie, also quoted earlier, described the support system she experienced at Eastside. She taught here previously, took a position elsewhere and recently returned. She chose to return to this school and compared it to other schools.

I chose to come back here, it was challenging, but there is a spirit of camaraderie among the staff that's missing in a lot of the schools.

It is a real support system. If there is a problem, whether it is a personal problem, something to do with the parents or the children, there is always someone there who has experienced that same kind of difficulty, that can guide you along or just be there to talk to as a listening board. We've all faced similar problems, we have grown in that respect, we know how to handle them now, but we always have that support system there. (Melanie, taped conversation, March 1, 2000)

Both Melanie and Annette cited the "spirit of camaraderie" here, adding that this is "missing in a lot of schools". They referred to the support, community and connectedness, and Annette simultaneously described the school as a community and a family. This school seemed to have the power to hold these people within the walls.

When I met Catherine she had only been in this school for a year. She worked in another school for many years and felt worried about changing positions, however, the staff welcomed her. When I listened to the tape I realized I asked her to describe "the

spirit of the school". I did not intentionally use that phrase and I did not use this phrase in other conversations. I was referring to the atmosphere, the tone or mood of the school.

As a newcomer I found everyone to be most pleasant and most helpful. After so many years in one school I was worried about breaking the ice and you hear horror stories about different schools, but in this school they were really welcoming. (Catherine, taped conversation, January 10, 2000)

For her, the spirit of the school was welcoming, where she could break the ice. She had been worried because "you hear horror stories" about schools.

I think of these stories of other schools as "system myths". In a large school system, several stories circulate and take on the quality of myths. We are surprised when we are saved from the calamities described in the myths, but we continue to believe the stories are true, in other schools. One system myth is that you are better off in your own school, other schools are not good and "you hear horror stories". Reworded: You can sit with anyone in *our* staff, but not in some other staff rooms.

Peter, in a conversation about comments he heard on the tapes, wondered whether people were saying positive things because they knew he would be listening. However, he also thought that their positive comments provided evidence about the nature of the school. He also called up stories of other schools.

People here don't tend to focus on the struggles people are having. We tend to overlook, I think as a staff and maybe that's one of our strengths, we tend to acknowledge 'ya, they're a bit this way, but that's who they are'. And it's not – I'm sure if I was in a different school where people are critical or catty like some schools are – very cliquey – you would have more negative comments. (Peter, taped conversation, January 21, 2000)

This echoes Shirley's comment that Peter had come to a very safe place. As a new teacher, this school became a powerful influence in his shaping. I wondered how this special place shaped him.

This place also shaped my research. During my term here as a member of the Literacy Support Team, I felt like one of the staff. When I decided to carry out this research project, in which I hoped to ask teachers to talk about another teacher, I knew I wanted to work here. In *this* school. I felt its special-ness. These people in this place welcomed me, supported this research, and every person on staff willingly met with me to share their stories.

This school is a safe and caring place for kids

There are people who can't do this work, because there is a tremendous emotional toll that goes along with it. The sense of frustration sometimes is played out in what we see but can't do all that much about, and that's what makes the work hard. You have to believe that every time a child comes through this door that you are making a difference, that this is a safe place. (Adelina, taped conversation, January 27, 2000)

The children get the teacher's undivided attention when they need it, they know the teacher's there for them. We kick them out at the end of the day and they'd love to stay, that's why the clubs are so popular. I've had kids say "I came to the parking lot everyday over the holidays hoping someone would be here". (Elaine, taped conversation, January 10, 2000)

For a lot of kids in these neighborhoods, school is a safe haven. It's a place where you are liked and you are valued, and they don't get that at home. I've found the kids, most of them, are happy children, most of them, and they are glad to be here. I really thought, you know how some days you go along thinking, well, you're not even noticed at all, especially by the kids. Until they announce it's your birthday and I think I had 300 kids tell me happy birthday. (Catherine, taped conversation, January 10, 2000)

This school was described again and again as a safe place for kids, where they are valued and happy, where teachers are making a difference. Children in this school went out of their way to greet Catherine on her birthday, and they arrived during holidays hoping an adult would be at school.

During my time in this school, Kayla Rolland, a grade one child in Mount Morris Township, Michigan, was shot and killed in class by a grade one boy, a classmate. I pasted the article in my journal and wrote this response. As I drove to school the next day I realized that, even with that incident in my mind, I felt safe going to Eastside Elementary School. I felt safe, even knowing I might not be. When children bring guns to school, this disrupts our notions of child innocence as well as school security. If an adult intruder enters a school with a gun, that is one thing – an outsider bringing evil in. When one of our own brings a gun, it is quite another thing – an insider showing us that evil lurks within. We hope that students are safe with each other. We want them to be part of a community, a happy family.

> Of course students enter through the doors, they enter from outside, they bring the world with them. We do not leave our Real Life out there, with our boots. So are we creating a mythological world, a fantasy, a Disneyland where everyone is nice? As we create a world where everyone is nice, what happens to the emotions, to the body, to heart and soul? We attempt to control our bodies and the bodies of others...
>
> Reports like this upset people because they don't want to know. School should be invisible just carrying on with these children. These reports indicate all is not well. And first we look to the school for solutions, we blame. But it is more and more obvious. Some of the blame rests outside the schools.
> Journal entry, February 18, 2000

Some school systems have responded to these events by implementing tougher rules and regulations. Zero tolerance has become a mantra and harassment has been banned. I thought about issues like these when I wrote that teachers are attempting to control our own bodies and the bodies of others. I wondered if school staffs can banish negative behaviours in schools or if we only drive them underground. When we "create a world where everyone is nice," I wondered what happens to those emotions.

Holy Places are considered sanctuaries, places separate from daily lives. People are supposed to be secure inside a church. In Holy Places, we celebrate births, weddings, and deaths, as our body journeys through the stages of life. But bodies don't usually die in schools. Schools are supposed to celebrate the living, with the young people representing the future. When Kayla died inside a school building, I was reminded that bodies exist in schools, her death brought mind, body and soul together in ways that disrupted school life. In situations like this, the school system often sends out crisis teams to assist students and staff. Special assemblies are held. The community draws together in the tragic event, and the activities are decidedly church-like.

In Taber, Alberta, Jason Lang, a high school student, was shot and killed on April 28, 1999. His father happened to be the town's Anglican minister, so an unusual connection between church and a public school occurred. Reverend Lang played an instrumental role in the town's healing process and he publicly supported the school. This year, when Taber remembered last year's tragedy (Bly, 2000), a special assembly was held and Reverend Lang was involved.

Media reports about school violence, such as these, remind me that society wants schools to be safe and secure places for children. The stories evoke shock, and a public outcry follows these events, and schools implement security procedures. Bullying and harassment among students are cited as possible causes. The "crisis in schools" is analyzed on television news reports. This shock and outcry, it seems to me, reveals our society's expectations for public schools.

In my conversations I heard that the school was a haven from the everyday lives of the children. When Catherine referred to "a lot of kids in these neighborhoods…" she

referred to the common story about certain communities. Teachers believed that for many children, this school was the best place in their lives. When they entered these doors, they were safe with the teachers.

I see links here to statements describing good teachers, cited earlier. I heard that good teachers love children and model appropriate behaviours. Good teachers show caring and compassion and are dedicated and committed. Good teachers do not do this work for the money. The Good teachers have a mission. "This school is a safe and caring place for children" seems closely linked to the school's mission.

In this school we have a mission

As a child attending Sunday School in the church basement I heard all about missions. Our silver collection helped send people overseas to work in various missions. The slide shows or movies always portrayed smiling black or brown people, in brightly colored outfits, who benefited from the work of these missionaries. A mission, in my mind, was a place, usually in a warm country, where "we" saved "them". Being members of the United Church of Canada, our mission was not to convert them, to "save" them in that sense, but to dig wells, run hospitals, build community centers. I was comforted knowing my nickels and dimes supported such good people.

Now schools and businesses write a mission statement.

When the principal said you "have to believe that every time a child comes through this door that you are making a difference," she expressed her mission. The teachers in this school had a strong sense of mission, and believed they were "making a difference" in the lives of children.

Another teacher, Shauna, told me that teachers want to be here in this school. The teachers shared responsibility for all students in the building, not just their own class.

We all believe we are at a high needs school and we have children that are more complicated in their emotional needs and just basic living needs, and all the teachers that are here, want to be here, no one is here because they had to be here. Because of that we are very open and sharing of information. Every child in the school is your responsibility you're just not responsible for those in your classroom and the knowledge about all the children is shared as best we can. (Shauna, taped conversation, January 11, 2000)

In my conversation with Melanie, she described her belief that all children can learn, once they feel accepted and liked by the teacher.

I have never looked at the background of the child to judge whether or not they are able to learn. I think every child is able to learn whether it is using one method or another. A lot of the children in order to get to the learning stage need to know they're appreciated, need to know they're liked and supported. Once you get over that barrier then the learning comes. (Melanie, taped conversation, March 1, 2000)

In one of my first conversations with Peter, he explained his personal reasons for entering teaching.

I said "what can I do with my psychology degree?" and I thought about the similarities between elderly people and kids and the nurturing and why did I like working with elderly people and I'm fascinated with learning and memory and things like that. I took a lot of courses around learning and memory in university. So I thought 'you know what I like kids too.' And I was told, as I was growing up, baby sitting and stuff, "you have a real way with kids, kids trust you. Kids trust you. There's something about you kids like." So I said why don't I try going into education. (Peter, taped conversation, Nov. 13, 1998)

He entered teaching because of his interest in learning, but also because he enjoyed babysitting and was told that kids trust him and like him.

In another conversation he defined the goals of teaching in his own words.

Our goal as teachers is to try to raise, and help develop, well adjusted kids who are responsible contributors to society. That's why there is government money into education and there you go. (Peter, taped conversation, January 12, 2000)

In this school, teachers appreciated and liked the children, gave them attention, believed in them, and believed that teachers were making a difference. Not only was the school a safe and caring place for children, but also for teachers.

The staff members describe their missions in common language: caring for all, creating a safe place, getting over barriers, making a difference, raising responsible citizens. While the basics of curriculum are important parts of schooling, these are useless, in this school, without these underlying beliefs. The shared school story says that everyone here holds similar beliefs. They are working together towards shared purposes.

While writing about this school as a special place, I was also thinking about *schools* as sacred *places*. This is more than just Eastside Elementary.

I listened to people, such as Annette, tell me that parents are "expecting the staff in a school to …model appropriate behaviour, good decision making, gentleness, caring, respect." She added that when she looked at her children, she could see "…how their personalities are changing because of the roles teachers are playing" (Annette, taped conversation, January 6, 2000). She is relying on teachers and the education system.

The United Nations, in article 28 of the Rights of the Child, recognizes the right of the child to education. In Article 29, they agree that the education shall be directed to preparing the child for "a responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among people…" . This statement is remarkably similar to Annette's.

In Canada, Egerton Ryerson, considered by some historians as the founder of public education, stated that public education's "prime objective was to overcome the general ignorance of the people by establishing a system of common schools for all…"

(Wilson, 1970, p, 214). Further, he wrote that education "is a public good, ignorance is a public evil." The school's mission is to battle the forces of evil. He also stated that education must be compulsory, free and available to all.

Finally, the official Program of Studies for Alberta, defines the program's vision as "optimizing human potential". The mission statement declares that the learning community "enables Albertans to be responsible, caring, creative, self-reliant and contributing members of a knowledge-based and prosperous society (p. 2).

As I read published thoughts of other educators I see similar themes. Education is a sacred trust that society must deliver to the next generation. Glickman (2000), for example, states that education "is respectful, challenging, and democratic, preparing students to use their skills, knowledge, and understanding to exercise choices about how to self-govern and govern with others – to have choices of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness" (p.46). In the face of standardization, he implores schools to hold on to democratic ideals. He declares that we are "at a time when we must hold to a sacred concept of public education, a concept of the pursuit of truth in the marketplace of ideas" (p.50).

Maxine Greene writes eloquently about public education, and I hesitate to pull only one or two quotes out of her work. However, during my research, I have often found her writings, along with her speeches at the annual meetings of the American Educational Research Association, to be inspirational. She reminds me that "the main point of education (in the context of a lived life) is to enable a human being to become increasingly mindful with regard to his or her lived situation – and its untapped possibilities" (Greene, 1995, p. 182). She states that classrooms "ought to be nurturing

and thoughtful and just all at once; they ought to pulsate with multiple conceptions of what it is to be human and alive" (43). This resonates with comments I heard about Peter's classroom. When Annette described how she saw her children's personalities change, she was seeing them opening to possibilities. When she and others told me the men on this staff were different, perhaps they were touching on this notion of "multiple conceptions of what it is to be human."

Those who met with me all expressed views about education that went beyond the simple acquisition of basic knowledge. When the people in this dissertation discussed the male teachers they knew, I heard their expression of mission statements.

Is this school special or sacred?

As I traced Peter's shaping, I heard stories about this school. This school exhibited features that could be described as special. Peter and the others believed they were lucky to be working in such a special school. That perception influenced their work with students.

No one described the school as sacred. This is my word, as I listened to the conversations over time and linked words and actions. It was not merely that this school was special but when the ideals and dreams of staff, parents and students were considered, this became a sacred place. In Canada and the United States of America, we have separated church and state to a certain degree, and public schools are seen as "secular", yet many traces of the church remain. I must utilize this word cautiously, as some historical connections between church and state are not viewed as positive, such as

the church operated residential schools for aboriginal peoples. Thus thinking of schools as sacred can have multiple interpretations.

It was not the actual building that held this sacredness, but it was the people who opened the doors, took off their shoes, and entered. As they entered they began to talk as if the school was a kind of sacred place, and the teachers expected themselves to perform miracles. They believed they made a difference in children's lives. In this building, good things happened.

I often wondered during this past year whether anyone could live out these ideals. I wondered how the school could continue to maintain its sacredness year after year, and I wondered if Peter could maintain his position even inside this sacred place. When a place is held up as sacred, the risk of a fall is greater.

listen to these words:

You have to believe
every time a child comes
through this door
you are making a difference.
Every child in the school is
your responsibility.

safe
caring
compassion
committed
phenomenal
community
connected
support
family
haven
welcoming

you can sit beside anyone

Take off your shoes.

In addition, sacredness may silence certain stories. Sacred places can also restrict and constrain individual freedom. Perhaps this was why this school needed to banish the previous men, yet allow their ghosts to live on in the stories. While the previous men, who did not fit, are gone, their stories teach others how to behave. At the same time, the stories of those individual men are not heard. Their stories are silenced. Sacredness may silence certain stories to maintain the story of sacred place.

Once they entered the doors, the teachers considered everyone in the building as members of a family. They liked feeling that the children were part of the family, and as such, the children became "their children". All the teachers felt responsible for all the children. When they talked about "this school" they described it as special and safe.

This school, which was a sacred place, provided the place for Peter's shaping as a special person. He was storied as different. However, as I listened to staff and parents, I began to think that they were expecting more of him than was humanly possible. I turn now to the final strong story, in which I describe other expectations parents and teachers expressed. I heard Peter described in ways that elevated him to a heightened status.

6. The third panel: The Reluctant Superhero

"I just love him. I'll tell you lots of good things."

"He is the most amazing man."

"He did wonders for my son."

"Men who work with young children seem to know they should be there...It takes courage and the men have to really love and have passion to be here."

"He's not just here for the job - he puts himself in his work. We look at our children as our greatest treasures - and we feel completely comfortable when they are with this teacher."

"His peace comes across."

"I wanted Donny in his class because he was a man and I wanted Ellen in his class because now I know he's an excellent teacher."

"I prefer to see male teachers. I like it a lot better than female teachers. I would have done better myself if I'd had more male teachers. All the male teachers I had in my life had an impact on me."

"...almost god sent"

"It's nice to see a man who is warm and caring... you don't have to be loud, brazen or aggressive to be macho... ".

In a time when schools have been "beat up", people still expect teachers to represent "good" and "desirable" qualities of caring, hard work, decentness, respect. These teachers have a mission, are here because they want to be, believe in their life work. These qualities must be embodied - revealed in the men working with young kids.
(Journal entry, January 10, 2000)

When I look at the drawing, "The Line Up", I see an ordinary class of children, lining up on a sunny day to return to the school for math. Peter Thompson looked like an ordinary young man, with short hair, cargo style pants and a casual shirt with no tie. His work in the classroom was "ordinary", and this classroom looked like hundreds of other classrooms. He was a meek, mild-mannered, elementary teacher.

When I look at these excerpts from several conversations, what I see does not appear ordinary. When I "add up" the comments I think that one teacher could not do all this. I see expectations that elevate his status into a mythological realm.

During my first few visits in the school I thought to myself, 'I'm not seeing anything different because he's a man – what will I write about?' I watched a good teacher, but did not see differences between this teacher and the woman teacher in the next classroom. When I asked Peggy, one of the parents, if I could meet with her to discuss Peter's work with her children, she told me she "loved him" and would tell me "lots of good things". She summarized what I heard from many people in the school. At first I felt pleased, for him, that parents and other teachers value him. He seemed highly regarded in the school. But as time went on I began to see a pattern, I began to think that he would have to be a Superhero to accomplish everything others expected. Like a superhero, he was honored, almost revered, by those who knew him.

Was he a superhero, or an ordinary citizen? Was he a superhero in school, and an ordinary citizen outside the school? Does he leave his real life at the school door, to live a superhuman existence?

I thought about characteristics of superheroes.

Superheroes have powers and often have a weakness. Superheroes have a mission: to battle the forces of Evil. Superheroes represent Goodness. Superheroes often wear a disguise so they will pass as ordinary citizens. They embody a sense of mystery and often come from other places. Finally, Superheroes are usually male.

His Powers

He did wonders for my son. Peter came along at the right time for Donny, it put him on the right track, kept his enthusiasm for school going. We were just really fortunate. (Peggy, parent, taped conversation, September 24, 1999)

He is the most amazing man. (Annette, taped conversation, January 6, 2000)

I prefer to see male teachers. I like it a lot better than female teachers. I would have done better myself if I'd had more male teachers. All the male teachers I had in my life had an impact on me. (Diane, parent, taped conversation, March 7, 2000)

The superhero's powers separate him from ordinary humans. He uses these powers to battle the forces of evil. He obtains these powers through extraordinary events that usually occur before the present story began. His powers are in his body. When Diane, a parent, said she preferred male teachers because all her male teachers had impacted her, she showed that his powers must interact with forces outside himself. While his powers reside in his maleness, the reactions of others in the elementary school activate his powers.

Peggy was the parent who first showed me Peter's superhero status. We met out on the playground early in September 1999. Her daughter, Ellen, was one of the children in his class this year, and her older son, Donny, had been in this class two years ago. I hoped she would be my first taped conversation with a parent.

On the morning of September 24, Peggy and I met in the school library. We sat at a library table with the tape recorder between us and she willingly told me many details of her story.

She told me about her first introduction to the school.

We had just moved to the city after leaving a small town up north and I called the school. The secretary said "come on over, I'll show you around," so I came in. She said "We have two grade one teachers, Mrs. C and Mr. T." I said "you have a man?" She said "he's wonderful, you'll love him, he's really good", and I thought for my son, that would be really good because of leaving his dad and I thought to have a man in his life, on a daily basis. I met him and he seemed like a nice guy. It worked out wonderfully. (Peggy, taped conversation, September 24, 1999)

I wondered, now that two years have passed, how she thinks about Peter's influence on Donny's life. Peggy openly expressed her admiration and appreciated the impact he had on her son's life. I asked her to try to describe this impact.

He did wonders for my son. Peter just came along at the right time for Donny, and it put him on the right track, kept his enthusiasm for school going, we were just really fortunate. They were very close, he meant a lot to Donny, and things will come up, just different things that we encounter and his name will come into it. He'll say something like "Mr. T's like this" or whatever. He's only in grade three and hasn't had a lot of teachers, but he's definitely the most influential. There was just something different. (Peggy, taped conversation, September 24, 1999)

Like what? I wondered. What is different from other teachers?

I don't know. Maybe it's because they are different, maybe it's because male teachers stand out. (Peggy, taped conversation, September 24, 1999)

Working with younger kids requires more – it's almost like – more mothering. You know because they are younger they need more care than just they stay in their desks and you teach. They need more of that – maybe you shouldn't call it mothering – maybe it's almost a parenting kind of thing. (Peggy, taped conversation, September 24, 1999)

Again, I asked when she asked the principal to place Donny in his class, what was she looking for?

I think I was looking for more of the parenting. I don't know – a male role model - I don't think my son needs to see the macho role model to teach him how to be a man. I think he needs to see how to be a good person and Peter is a good example of that. He's a man who plays basketball and ties kids' shoes. I really like what he showed my son. He was impressionable at that time, it was something that made a difference then but I think there's a greater possibility that it will make a difference to who he is, in a good way, a positive influence. Maybe he'll be a better dad because of his example. (Peggy, taped conversation, September 24, 1999)

Now two years later, she asked for her daughter, Ellen, to be placed in Peter's class.

The difference between when I wanted Donny in his class and I wanted Ellen in his class now... I wanted Donny in his class because he was a man and I wanted Ellen in his class because now I know he's an excellent teacher

Although now they are away from their dad again, and – that's part of it too – now she has – the benefit of his being a man and having – a man in her life... (Peggy, taped conversation, September 24, 1999)

This is a teacher-as-superhero story. The members of this family "loved him" and credited him with having the power to change their lives. Her son enjoyed grade one, but in addition, Peggy considered the possibility that because of this teacher's influence, her son might become a better father himself. She projected Peter's influence into her son's future! She did not seem to imagine that he might influence Ellen to be a better mother, indeed, she realized that she wanted Donny in his class because he was a man, but wanted Ellen in his class because she knows he is an excellent teacher.

This teacher modeled "how to be a good person", and he "is a good example of that." She said that you just don't often see a man who is comfortable with little kids, still strict but understanding. She knew that being a good person was more important, yet still

appreciated his "male influence". While stating that she wanted Ellen in his class because he is an excellent teacher, she added that Ellen also has the "benefits" of his being a man.

Annette, the staff member cited earlier, also told me he had the power to change lives. I asked her to describe Peter. If she were telling a friend about the staff at this school, how would she describe him?

I find Peter to be a most amazing man, mainly because he has the ability to work with, to see, to understand, a really young child at that grade level. He has a peace about him that comes across with kids and parents that is absolutely phenomenal. That was one of the first impressions I had about him. He loves being here and he loves what he is doing and it shows – and often you don't see that anymore. So if I had to tell anyone about Peter I would have to say he is really quite amazing. (Annette, taped conversation, January 6, 2000)

When the superhero is described as amazing, we have witnessed his feats. We see something, such as Peter's ability to understand kids and work with parents. In addition, the superhero represents goodness, he is Good. Peter's inner peace is obvious, Not only did Peter portray these traits, but he was here because he "loves what he is doing".

Annette went on to describe Peter, and other men she has worked with, who chose to teach young children.

Society has perceived the male teacher as a teacher of older children, and so, I think, it's surprising, for society, when men might want to choose that, and it seems almost feminine when they want to do that, and it takes a great deal of courage and you have to really love and have passion for what you want to do, to be able to do that. For a woman it's the norm. It is much easier for a women to make the transition to high school, than for a man to teach grade one. It is not as easy. It takes a great deal of courage. (Annette, taped conversation, January 6, 2000)

The fact that Peter chose to teach young children automatically separated him from other men, and from women teachers. For Annette, to see a woman teach grade one is the norm, but to see a man, is special. It takes courage. She went on to say that a female working with young children has an "expectation that that relationship is going to work…

a maternal, motherly experience that will automatically happen", whereas a male has to "transcend past that" and show a different side of himself, along with the "male side of himself". Men have to prove themselves.

Later in the conversation, I asked her how parents react to his presence, when they first arrive to register a child for grade one.

At first you can almost see an apprehension, until they meet him. He can just walk down the hall and you can see the parent's face relax. I think society has done an injustice in that they have given our parents a really ugly look at males and teaching. I think the media has done a really poor job. You never hear that this male is doing an incredible job, but you hear this male teacher fondled this child or did that. And so people come into the school and hear that a young child is going into a room with a male teacher, they worry. But when they see Peter – it's gone.

Men who choose to teach grade one almost are God-sent. They seem to know this is where they should be, and that comes through, that is personified to people who come to register children. (Annette, taped conversation, January 6, 2000)

If others describe Peter as a superhero, I wonder how this shapes his work as a teacher. In these stories he is expected to change lives. The people around him assume that he possesses these powers. A superhero has powers for a reason. I wonder why he has these powers.

His Mission

He's not just here for the job - he puts himself in his work. We look at our children as our greatest treasures - and we feel completely comfortable when they are with this teacher. (Albert, parent, taped conversation, March 14, 2000)

Superheroes always have a mission: they tirelessly battle the forces of evil. As discussed earlier, good teachers battle the forces of evil in many ways. They show children the way to enlightenment. They fight the darkness of ignorance, and demonstrate the joys of learning. Teachers view learning as salvation. In staff member Shauna's view, Peter's mission is that he "wants all the children to be the best they can be and he sees it

as his job to give them the best that he can possibly be". (Shauna, taped conversation, January 13, 2000)

Perhaps these qualities are revealed when discussing men, because people believe these men chose to teach young children. As Annette said "men who work with young children seem to know they should be there...It takes courage and the men have to really love and have passion to be here" (Annette, taped conversation, January 6, 2000). A women teacher seems ordinary, an excellent women teacher is valued but is not perceived as heroic. She is simply doing what women do.

I met Jeff's parents, Albert and Janine, on March 14, 2000. Albert worked out of town and as a result, when he was in town, he was available to his family. Jeff's older sister, Jane, was in Peter's class for grades one and two, because in this school, the teachers stayed with a class for two years. She was now in grade three. Her younger brother Jeff, was now in grade one. At the beginning of the conversation I asked them to tell me when they first met Peter. Albert answered first.

We met Peter when Jane went to grade one. In Jane's eyes, starting out, he was the greatest thing since sliced bread. He was always a positive influence on her, he could relate to her very well. He relates to children very well. He has that true concern that comes across not like he's here just for a job but he's putting himself into his work. (Albert, taped conversation, March 14, 2000)

Peter put himself into his work and he was not here just for the job. These parents believed he had a mission. A superhero performs deeds because he is a superhero. That is his reason for existing. A superhero always puts "himself" into his job, that's what superheroes do, because the powers reside in the body. A superhero performs.

I asked what they saw Peter do.

He showed Jane that teachers are people too. When him and his wife had their first baby, he brought the baby in for the class to see and brought his wife in, they all met.

He wasn't just a figurehead, it was like a family. He's doing his job to help them grow up and learn. After two years, Jane would have taken him again for grade three.

Jeff went to kindergarten here, and prior to kindergarten, we'd pick Jane up in grade one, and he developed a relationship with Mr. Thompson that way, through Jane.

We requested to have Mr. Thompson to teach Jeff. (Albert, taped conversation, March 14, 2000)

I responded that Jeff seemed to be a happy child, and that he loved being in school. Janine answered:

Oh ya! He reads well for his age and Mr. Thompson has a lot to do with that. We can only do so much at home, he's got them longer than us and we see results. (Janine, taped conversation, March 14, 2000)

Here Peter was simultaneously "the greatest thing since sliced bread" and an ordinary person, who was not a figurehead. The class was like a family, and Peter is doing his job, helping them "grow up and learn." Janine added "I wish he could teach them until grade twelve, to tell you the truth.". These two children came from what I saw as a secure family, and thus, their parents did not want Peter to provide stability, or a male role model. They viewed him as an excellent teacher who provided education in a safe, family-like environment. They went on to describe their confidence in Mr. Thompson, and this school.

We look at it that our three children are our greatest treasures so to speak, and they spend so much time in the school year away from us, and we feel completely comfortable with Mr. Thompson and this entire school. Because it's a good attitude, not just one section of it, it seems the whole attitude of the school is for the kids. (Albert, taped conversation, March 14, 2000)

When Peter heard these children are described as "our greatest treasures", he wondered if he would ever measure up to the parents' expectations. However, he need not worry, these parents held him in high regard, and indeed, echoed the staff members comments about this school. They, too, thought the school had a "good attitude".

Remembering Annette's comments about parents' first reactions to Peter, I asked them to recall their first reaction when they brought Jane to grade one three years ago. Albert answered.

Originally I was surprised when Jane got Mr. Thompson in grade one. I don't know why, maybe it's just I never heard of one (a male grade one teacher). I just made the assumption that he taught grade five or six, when I saw him while Jane was still in kindergarten. I was just surprised. But we try not to judge a book by the covers. (Albert, taped conversation, March 14, 2000)

And they learned that he was an excellent teacher with a mission. But I wondered as I listened how Peter lived out his own mission as a teacher. I also felt concerned that when Peter is placed on a pedestal, he can easily fall off. When I think about a superhero, I think about the relationship between his powers, his mission and his weakness.

His Weakness

Superheroes have a weakness, and enemies often look for this weakness in order to defeat the hero. Defeat of the superhero results in an imbalance of evilness. The Bad Guys win. The weakness can defeat him. Peter's weakness exists in his body. The fears of others can activate the weakness.

Even Peggy, the parent who "loved him," knew that "people" might have trouble with Peter's presence in the classroom. She spoke hesitantly as she said this, and seemed to be thinking out loud. She chose her words carefully.

People worry, I think too much – about – and one of things that might be a problem for male teachers, I would think, is the male teacher's interaction with girls – you know it's okay for a woman to take care of little boys but not okay for a man – that's the idea – maybe that's what makes people – unsure about it... (Peggy, taped conversation, September 24, 1999)

I wondered what Peter did, over the year, that made it okay for her. Why wasn't she unsure of him?

Maybe it's because he doesn't worry about it. He goes in there and he's not worried about what people are going to think if he hugs a child or puts his arm around them and he's willing to take that chance and do what needs to be done. He is willing to take that chance.

He is a man and you just don't see it very often, a man who is comfortable with little kids. He's strict, but he gets to their level, I know he understands. That's what makes an elementary teacher, I'm sure, you just don't see that in a man. (Peggy, taped conversation, September 24, 1999)

The source of his weakness was his maleness – *in this place*. To be comfortable with little kids might be perceived as inappropriate, or dangerous. The very actions Peggy admired, such as hugging a child and doing what's needed, involve taking a chance. The skill that "makes an elementary teacher", that "you just don't see in a man", involved risk.

Outside these walls he was an ordinary man, inside these walls he was unusual, an amazing man. Even in this school, described as special by parents and teachers, the man who taught young children was in a dangerous position. Peggy believed he was willing to "do what needs to be done" that he didn't worry about what others think. I wondered about that. I wondered how he organized his life in order to protect himself? I wondered if there were occasions when he could not do what was needed.

Peggy appreciated Peter's influence because he read storybooks, played guitar, performed magic tricks and put an arm around a little kid. He plays basketball and ties kids' shoes. She did not want her son to be like his father, so she regarded Peter as a good influence. She hoped for balance, but when she talked about her son she knew she expressed conflicting ideas.

This might sound contradictory but I don't want Donny to be feminine. I want him to have those nurturing qualities but I do want Donny to be in some ways like my dad. As much as I want my son to be a Renaissance Man, I want him to know how to fix cars. (Peggy, taped conversation, March 9, 2000)

This statement is nearly identical to Pollack's, when he writes about society's contradictory expectations for boys.

> We want them to be 'new men' in the making, showing respect for their girl peers, sharing their feelings in emotionally charged circumstances, and shedding their macho assumptions about male power, responsibility, and sexuality. In short, we want our boys to be sensitive New Age guys and still be cool dudes. (Pollack, 1999, p. xxv)

Perhaps it is not only male elementary teachers who live with contradictory roles, but so do our children. Perhaps Peter's experience of contradictory expectations is an accurate reflection of society after all! Peter's maleness is the source of his strength and his weakness, at the same time. He must be a sensitive new age guy and a cool dude, he must play basketball and tie kids' shoes, he must be strict and get down to their level. If he failed to perform these deeds, he would become a suspected male. He would lose his status as a superhero. The Big Bad Wolf is not a hero.

Jeff's parents touched on this topic as well. At the end of our conversation, Albert told me this story about a trip to the Calgary Stampede.

> *Last year, we went to the Calgary Stampede. Before we went I told them if we get separated and you're lost, don't go to a man. I told them, go to a lady with a Stampede vest on and tell her you're lost and she'll take you to that trailer. I think it's because you hear all these things in the news about men and pedophiles. Not to say teachers are that, but if you are going to make a mistake, it's better to err caution on the side of the child. I think that was the original shock – 'oh, it's a man teacher'. (Albert, taped conversation, March 14, 2000)*

I have had many conversations over the past two years while engaged in this study with a variety of people. Often, under the surface, lurks this fear about sex and sexuality. No one wants to express it explicitly, but this story precisely touches this fear. A little blond girl and boy, lost at the Stampede, would be in danger. It is assumed that a woman, even an unknown woman, would be safe. At school, the same assumption would be made about the teachers – male and female.

I wonder how Peter juggles these conflicting expectations. Like a superhero, the fall from grace would be catastrophic.

The Disguise

The superhero passes as an ordinary citizen by day and fights evil by night. He does not want to be recognized, as the superhero, because he is so good. He fights the forces of evil because that is his mission, not for fame or fortune. He takes an ordinary job and wears ordinary clothes so no one will recognize his superhero identity.

This teacher works with children by day, and goes home at night. At home he might be a "good" husband and father but we don't actually know. As he walks through the doors of the school, he becomes the superhero.

He is cross-dressing, in a sense, by becoming an elementary teacher. He is "Not Woman" which is the source of his special status. He is "Different from Typical Men", which heightens his status in the elementary school. But he is also like a woman because he teaches young children, cross stitches and shows emotion.

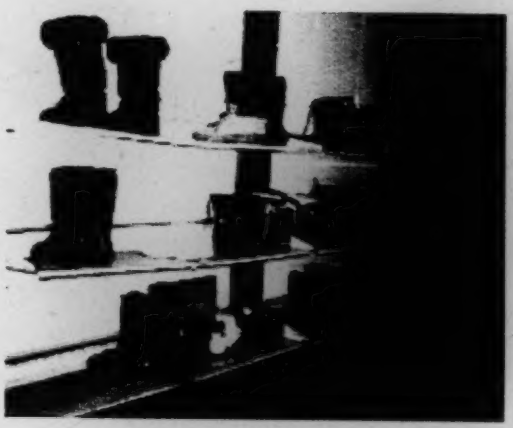
He is an ordinary human being, expected to deal with the superhuman expectations of the job. Is he human or superhuman? I began to think of this story as "The Reluctant Superhero" after January 12, 2000.

On that day Peter had been called outside. The mother of Kerri, one of his students, had seen a boy carrying a brand new boot filled with snow. She tried to stop him, knowing that somewhere a child would be missing the boot. Previously, in the classroom, someone had taken Kerri's boots, and hidden them from her. Peter jumped to the conclusion that this boy was likely guilty of that crime too. As he went out to confront the boy, he felt his anger and frustration rising. In telling the story to me at lunch, he felt his emotions again.

I listened to the tape of this conversation several times, and felt the emotional energy of the story. I decided to write the conversation as a poem, using only his words but revising and rearranging them.

Only Human

For three days in a row Kerri's boots
were in the garbage can
we couldn't find out who was doing it.



Someone knew they were Kerri's
and decided to pick on her because
she's different
and has special needs.
It takes Kerri so long
to walk home with her mom
and they walk for the exercise
and they don't have time to look for boots.
Her boots are kept in the classroom now.

So today
when Kerri's mom saw Danny carrying a brand new boot filled with snow,
she tried to stop him and she said,
"You need to bring that boot back, you need to talk to the teacher – don't walk away."
"Be quiet," he said and kept walking.
She ran in the school all in a panic saying,
"He's walking away, he's walking away with the boot."

I went out.
Danny was carrying the boot full of snow,
two boots on his feet,
the extra boot in his hand,
just walking away with it.
I was so mad.
I didn't even see the other kids my eyes just focused right on him.
I could hardly speak because I was so upset for Kerri's mom,
And I was thinking about Kerri's boots in the garbage,
And I thought Danny must be the one who did that.

I was so angry, I didn't yell, but I was so angry,
I was thinking he was genuinely scared of me,
and maybe he won't come back this afternoon.
"You'd better be back this afternoon or we'll find out where you are
and we'll come and get you!"
I didn't yell but I was so mad I had to clench my jaw.
I should have handled it calmer but I wasn't calm
because of what happened to Kerri - that keyed me up.

But even if this thing with Kerri hadn't happened,
when you see someone walking away with a brand new boot that doesn't belong to him
filled with snow and that boy is in the school crying because he can't find his boot...
when it disrupts all the things you already have to do as a teacher...
it's all backed up because you have to deal with this silliness,
that should not be happening because it is so blatantly wrong,
it is not an accident its on purpose...

How can you help it?
Your emotional responses are up
then you gotta be careful
not to bring that back to your classroom in the afternoon.
But how can you help it?
You try to calm down,
but we're all human beings,
trying to deal with an immense amount of pressure.

We are supposed to be superhuman.

Teachers are set up as an ideal
but who lives their lives as an ideal?
When you walk in these doors
Leave your real life out there
and be your superhuman ideal.

When you're supposed to be an ideal
you can't help but fail to reach that goal.

After I wrote the poem, I shared it with Peter. Our resulting conversations prodded my thinking about the superhuman expectations placed on teachers.

This human event involved bodies, emotions and relationships. Peter felt so angry he had to clench his jaw. He knew he must control himself, while dealing with a silly situation. He recalled the injustice of Kerri's previous treatment, when someone took her boots just to be mean. The boy's behaviour was blatantly wrong. But teachers are expected to model the "right" and "appropriate" behaviours. Even though Peter felt angry over a silly situation, he knew that he should have handled it differently, and that he should not take it back to the classroom. But, he asked, "How can you help it?"

It is interesting that teachers say "I'm only human" when wanting to explain certain behaviours. The expression of anger is seen as a human frailty. It seems that teachers must portray control, calmness and happiness. Children will say that someone is a good teacher because she is "nice". These are ways in which teachers feel the need to control our bodies.

All teachers are expected to be superhuman. I think that male teachers are also expected to be superheroes. But at great risk. This superhero status shapes Peter, as he develops his teaching abilities. While many asked him to be a role model, they also consider him a superhero. While they ask him to be a superhero, he says "I'm only human".

As Peter said, if we are expected to be superhuman, we cannot help but fail.

While writing this, I think about my life in the classroom. I wonder if I was always reluctant.

Was I a superhero too? Was I reluctant?

Sandy and Marci asked if they could go see the principal.
"Don't worry Mr. Jones, we are not in trouble," they assured me.
But as Sandy looked at me with her brown eyes I knew something was up.

Sandy and Marci informed me a few days later that
I had to stay out of my room during lunch.
"Don't worry", Sandy reassured me, "everything will be fine."
I worried.
"Does the principal know what you are up to? Is a teacher going to supervise you?"
"Don't worry", they answered,
and something told me not to worry.
I stayed in the staff room until the afternoon bell rang.

When I entered my grade two classroom,
the children all shouted "Surprise" and lead me to the chair in story corner.
They had decorated the room with streamers and balloons,
they wore their best clothes,
they brought a cake, a card and a present,

and my birthday is actually during the summer so they organized this celebration in June.

I don't like "Surprise" birthday parties
and decided not to allow this sort of thing to happen again,
and funny thing is, it hasn't.
But not because I stopped it,
but because since that year no students have offered it.
There was something about Sandy and Marci and the rest of the class and me
and that moment in time that resulted in a special, rare moment.

I wanted them to say "we love you Mr. Jones."
I wanted them to show me I was special.
I wanted letters from parents thanking me for influencing their child's life.
I wanted those cards from kids.
I wanted all that.

Maybe I wasn't so reluctant to be a superhero.
Perhaps my reluctance came after years and years of sitting beside children.
Possibly I wanted to hang up my superhero outfit and be someone else.
Maybe this is what I most miss about my days in the classroom.

Superheroes do not change. In many adventures in many sequels, they remain the same.

I wanted to hang up that superhero outfit, yet I now realize that I loved being special. I enjoyed the treatment I received as a special person on staff. It has been hard to give up this status, it was extremely seductive. Yet as I grew older, I needed it less. The superhero outfit was limiting. I could not grow. In addition, my work as a teacher was not well served when I am viewed as a superhero. Besides, it was exhausting. I could not maintain the status forever.

In this research I saw Peter as a younger version of myself, and his shaping as a teacher enlightened my memories of my own shaping.

The first three strong stories lay side by side in the collage. "Our men are Different", "This school is a Sacred Place", and "The Reluctant Superhero" are separate

but interrelated stories. As panels of the triptych, they touch each other. They provide a background on which I can overlay the next two specific stories.

While I lived in this classroom I heard many stories. The following two were chosen, because they touched on many issues. They spoke to me. They spoke to Peter. Here I lay them on each strong story. Each strong story changes the reading of the specific story.

I now turn to Mandy's wet underpants.

7. Adding a layer to the collage: Mandy's Wet Underpants

Mandy...
pale skin, unruly blond hair, ragged jogging suit,
her young body unable to cooperate
with the demands of the school,
she wet herself in class,
the only one, the only one,
the only one in the nurse's room,
changed
behind pulled curtain
closed door

Then they suggested
they suggested
they suggested

bubble bath!
infections!
different underpants!
talk to her mother!
you better get used to it!

all I did was knock.

not alone,
not alone,
not alone,
the office people and the principal knew.

There's a line here, I don't know exactly what it is, but there's a line.

Mandy joined Peter's class two months into the school year. With her pale skin, unruly blond hair and ragged jogging suit, I noticed her the moment she entered the room. I introduced myself but she said little. I soon noticed that she needed extra help with every assignment, so I often sat at her table of seven students, and assisted them all. She seemed constantly concerned about finding the "right answer" and checked with me each time, before making a mark on the page. Her drawing of the teacher, with the arms and legs attached to the head, is missing the life and emotions of the smiling children lining up after recess. Because I worked with her, every time I entered her classroom, she came over to talk to me.

Mandy's wet underpants

Today I sat at one table helping the students complete their graphing assignment until the bell rang. As the children lined up to leave I noticed that Mandy didn't get up. She was sitting in her chair with her head down, hidden by her folded arms – crying. I didn't hear why but she was talking to Peter. So I went out into the hall with the children. Later in the staff room he arrived for our scheduled meeting. He had been dealing with her. She had wet herself.

(Feb 4, 2000, field notes)

But when she had wet her pants in class just before lunch on February 4th, she sat in her chair and only her teacher could help. I did not know what was happening, so I took over dismissing the rest of the class and waited for Peter in the staff room. However, as I discovered during our taped conversation later, Peter couldn't easily help her either. First, he described bringing Mandy to the nurse's room by the office to change her clothes. He asked the secretary to help.

It was hard enough for me to say "come in here and change your clothes" and I was the only one in the nurse's room, I pulled the curtain and closed the door and said "Mandy are you finished?" – that was enough. The office people were there and they set her up in there to change and all I did was knock and said "Are you done?" and she was there at the door and "here you go here's your bag" and she walked out and I wasn't

alone with her and the principal knew I was there and what I was doing. (Peter, taped conversation, February 4, 2000)

It was difficult enough to figure out how to help Mandy in her time of need, to help her get changed, to wait uncomfortably outside the nurse's room, to ensure that the principal and secretaries knew what was happening. He knew he couldn't abandon her in the busy office during the lunch hour so he stood outside the door and waited for her. After she left, he called her mother who told him that Mandy doesn't like school. In addition, Mandy had previously had a bladder infection, and her mother thought this might be the problem today.

When he arrived in the staff room and told the others about Mandy, this was the part of the story the women picked up and they offered him several suggestions. He relayed this to me later.

They suggested that she gets, maybe, different underpants and that I should talk to the mother about it. As a male I'm not talking to a parent about undergarments for her daughter - maybe the nurse or the principal. Then again her mother said "last time this was an infection," I said "Well, had that been the case, it could be an infection now", like, I'm not going to suggest that until I know. (Peter, taped conversation, February 4, 2000)

It was difficult enough to figure out how to help Mandy in her time of need, but this conversation revealed a line separating him from the women on staff. Not only could they easily talk to a child's mother about undergarments, in addition, they didn't even seem to recognize that this might be difficult for him. When he said "I don't feel comfortable as a male, I can't do what you are suggesting that I do, I don't think it my place," they replied that he better get used to this since he has daughters.

... they said "you've got two girls you better get used to it." Well, yes, with my own girls I can deal with this just fine, it's a different relationship. To me, that's not even applicable to this. They can understand intellectually that I may not be comfortable with

a female student in this role - but emotionally they don't understand. (Peter, taped conversation, February 4, 2000)

They went on to describe their own difficulties with infections. One woman said that she no longer takes bubble baths. As I listened to them discuss bladder infections and bubble baths I too felt slightly uncomfortable. In our conversation I told Peter how I reacted.

Usually in the staff room there are not issues that are uncomfortable for me – but as they started talking about bubble baths and one of them said "I can't even take a bubble bath anymore" I thought 'I don't want to know!' They would be quite comfortable talking with each other about that – and sometimes women apologize to me when they get into these conversations and I say "I've got a wife at home and I know about that ...but really... (Garry: taped conversation, February 4, 2000)

Towards the end of this conversation with me, Peter realized that dealing with Mandy's wet pants brought many issues to the surface for him, and he previously would not have predicted that this situation could be so difficult.

Intellectually I would not have known this would be an issue, I might have guessed but when they actually made these suggestions, I knew I could not do that. When it comes up there is something inside of you that feels uncomfortable and you listen to that inner voice. Up until just an hour ago, that would all have been theoretical.

There's a line here, I don't know exactly what it is, but there's a line. We talk about issues for males in elementary. Yes, there are issues for men in elementary, but they are not good teaching issues, they are care giving role issues. (Peter, taped conversation, February 4, 2000)

When Peter heard that inner voice he knew he had discovered a line. Peter and I, two men who teach young children, know that there is a line here, but where is it, exactly? The closed door revealed many lines, although I think the lines are more like walls. These walls are usually invisible and this event revealed them, brought them to my awareness. It is not the closed door, in itself, that revealed the walls, it was the child behind the door. It was the door *between* the child and the man. It was the responses of

the other teachers. It was Peter's inner voice. It was a moment of school life. It was our conversation at lunch.

In the next section I lay this moment of school life over the three strong stories on the collage, "Our Men are Different", "This School is a Sacred Place" and "The Reluctant Superhero". I thought about what Mandy showed me, and I read Mandy's story differently in relation to each strong story.

Remembering that a collage is "an assembly of diverse fragments and ideas" (Webster's, 1988, p. 259), in the following I add diverse fragments and ideas as I think about the stories.

The first panel: Our Men are Different

Everyone in the school told me that the men on staff were different from "other men" and that because of the differences, the men were highly valued. More specifically, "our men" were different from the men previously on staff, the students' fathers, husbands, typical men and finally, the men are different from women. The men bring balance, completeness, perspective and "it's natural" when men and women work together with children. At the same time, in the daily work of teaching, gender did not seem to matter, the staff were quite "gender blind", and I noted that the gender of teachers would never be the subject of a bulletin board display.

Bodies

So is this man different? Not that different it would seem. All it took was a child's wet underpants, and he was on the other side of the door. This story showed me that Peter and Mandy brought their bodies to school. This single classroom event brought the

bodies forward in a way that demands this discussion, precisely *because* of the door between the child and the man. That door revealed so many lines and walls. Here we confront the physical, personal bodies of a man and a six year old girl.

Mitchell and Weber (1999), explain that "…in order to cultivate the mind, we mistakenly feel we must 'get past' the physical, personal body which can be distracting or even dangerous" (p. 127). Mandy's story brought the physical bodies into focus. But while we attempt to focus on the mind, we "teach with and through our bodies" and "children learn (or fail to learn) through theirs!" (p. 127). In Peter's classroom, for example, manipulatives were utilized in order to allow children to learn through their bodies. Action songs engaged the children's bodies while they sang about letters or beginning sounds. In science, the students observed and measured the classroom insects. Recess and physical education allow the children to stretch and move their bodies after the constraining hours in the classroom. While students in kindergarten and the primary grades sing, dance, paint and move about the spaces, older students move less and less and sit in their desks for long hours of the day.

While discussing ways children learn through their bodies is acceptable, the teacher's body is ignored. In their chapter entitled "Dressing and Redressing the Teacher's body", Mitchell and Weber (1999) argue that "the teacher body and its appearance need to be taken seriously" (p. 127). They point out that "discussion of the teacher's body is almost taboo, perhaps because contemplating the body unavoidably leads to the awkward (for educators) territory of basic bodily functions and characteristics, including pleasure and sexuality" (p. 127).

Peter was highly valued because of his perceived differences from other men. He was viewed as a man who cared for kids, who showed his emotions, who "plays basketball and ties kids' shoes". While Jeff's parents considered their two children their greatest treasures, they felt "completely comfortable with Mr. Thompson". Because of these qualities, staff and parents admired and valued him. However, when Mandy needed help in this way, he had to turn to the school secretary. He had only one reason for standing out in the hall and waiting for her: his male body.

This reminded me of Allan's (1993) statement that men "felt that they must overtly demonstrate care for children and sensitivity to their emotional needs. But, behaviors, that are perceived as natural demonstrations of these qualities in women, are off-limits to men..." (p. 124).

Peter was known for demonstrating care and sensitivity to the needs of children, but suddenly he faced behaviours (helping a child change her wet underpants) that were off-limits. The door separated him from the child, as well as from the women co-workers. Peter believed that he could not overtly demonstrate care for Mandy in the ways the women could. He showed sensitivity to her needs, by taking her to a woman, the secretary, to help her. Yet, as the women teachers reminded him, he is a father of daughters and knows perfectly well how to help a child change her clothes. Why couldn't he?

Allan (1993) goes on to state that men "who are elementary teachers are aware of others' attention to their maleness, as well as others' conflicting expectations and stereotypes of them as men" (p. 124). This situation placed him face to face with the attention of others, particularly the women teachers and possibly Mandy's mother, to his

maleness. In addition he felt forced into preserving exclusive male/female roles, by giving over the care of this child to the secretaries, then standing awkwardly outside the door. While he participated in the care of his daughters at home, no doubt bathing and changing them, he could not do this at school, because he must not place himself in a position that may be misunderstood. He would not do anything wrong, but others might wonder about his intentions or his thoughts. He must demonstrate to others that he is safe. Thus Peter was forced into demonstrating that men keep their distance from children and women are good and proper caregivers. Simultaneously, all conversations with parents and teachers indicated that people trusted Mr. Thompson with their children. If he is so trusted, why couldn't he help her?

I think this touches on deeper issues. While researching this topic for the past three years I have been struck with how quickly conversations about my research turn to the subject of sex and sexuality. The subject is usually hidden in the text of the conversation and the comments are veiled. When I tell people about my research, they tell me about their favorite teacher, a man who taught them in grade five or six. Then, in many conversations, they immediately say something like "men have to be so careful nowadays".

King (1998), in the only book I found about male elementary teachers, wrote that a "public perception is that men who teach are often either homosexuals, pedophiles or principals in training" (p. 3).

Peter's fear, then, is about perceptions. By staying out of the nurse's room while Mandy changes, he demonstrates that he is not a pedophile. He knows he is not interested in sexual relations with his students, but he must always ensure that perceptions about

him are clear. He must behave in ways that show he is trustworthy. As an elementary teacher, he must care and be a caring person, but he must demonstrate that caring differently than women staff members.

King, (1998, 2000) Allan (1993) and Sargent (2000) talked about touching. The men in their studies expressed concerns about how they touch or hug students. As King argues, men are "caught in a no-win situation." (p. 15). Many men enter teaching for "relationship-oriented work lives" (p.15). Yet they are "scrupulously monitored by others and ourselves. Paradoxically, the target of all the monitoring is our enactments of care" (p. 15). Men "are viewed as sexualized in predatory ways" (p. 17) and touching and hugging, are seen as sexualized activities. Thus, all touching between men and children is seen as sexual, and children, regarded as innocent, are always in danger. Thus, we need the image of elementary teacher as a good mother, or virginal young woman. So Peter was placed on the other side of the door.

Here we have underpants, wet underpants, a girl's underpants, and to talk about them to a mother, *or even to write about them in this paper*, opens oneself to suspicion.

(It's a risk I'll take, since everyone knows this is an academic paper and not some kiddy-porn fantasy. But words are words are words. How do you know? ? Is it because I say to you "trust me, you know I am a nice guy"? Maybe I am no different than those pedophiles out there. Is it about context? Maybe one day I will be sorry I took this risk. Can the sacredness of university research protect me?)

Underpants remind us of panties, and panties of sensuality. Panties are only viewed on the pages of catalogues, or in the store displays before Valentine's Day. And men don't look. Especially at a girl's panties.

Peter avoided looking. He called on the secretaries to help her and this man's presence on staff created work for the secretaries. He assured his safety by informing the principal, also a woman, that Mandy was changing her clothes. He further ensured that he was beyond reproach by rejecting the suggestions of the other teachers. It was clear to them that he won't be going around discussing undergarments with any parents!

It is safer if we make it clear that Peter and I are safe men. We are not pedophiles. We are not the big bad wolf, preying on innocent children.

We must always be on guard, against the stories others may compose about our actions. We must monitor our behaviours consistently.

Age of bodies

Bodies exist in this world, and human beings measure the age of bodies, then we tie many social, religious and legal implications to that age. Certain kinds of relationships between students and teachers are always frowned upon, but relationships do occur. The age of each participant is important. In their book, Erotics of Instruction, Barreca and Morse (1997) selected several stories about relationships between students (usually female) and teachers (usually male and usually at the college level). While these relationships are always conflict laden, at least the bodies are "adult", (although at high school, the students are often legally underage.) Even when the two are adults, the teacher is usually much older than the student which adds another level of complexity.

In the elementary school, however, the students are clearly children. An "inappropriate" relationship between a student and a teacher is clearly wrong in the eyes of the law, religious customs and dominant social values.

Or is it always so clear? Many women tell me they were madly in love with their grade five teacher. This is talked about as if it is perfectly normal for girls to fall in love with a male teacher. But because of the age of these bodies, nothing can happen. If no one acts out, if the feelings only result in unfulfilled fantasies, then all is "okay". The bodies cannot actually touch.

The age of the teacher is relevant as well. When I was young, teachers, parents and children alike responded to me like a big brother, or camp leader. I was "cool". And as King (1998, p.3) says, people also saw me as a principal in training. As a kindergarten teacher I was frequently asked when I was going to "move up the grades". Now that I am middle aged, my relationship with children is changing, perhaps even ambivalent. Now older than a father figure, I am more like a grandfather figure. I wonder if I am more suspect - perhaps people wonder why an old guy likes being around little kids. I am no longer a camp leader, big brother or future father. As an older teacher choosing to work with young children, I think I must be even more careful.

Peter is a relatively young and inexperienced teacher. He experienced a situation like this for the first time. While he knew this was an issue, as he said in our conversation "up until just an hour ago, that all would have been theoretical" (Peter, taped conversation, February 4, 2000). As a pre-service teacher, he learned about the code of ethics, and professional conduct, but when he was in the story, he felt there was a line somewhere. He was shaped by Mandy.

The place of the bodies

This story also revealed the importance of place. These bodies come together in small confined spaces. When so many people spend so much time in schools, the bodies are bound to touch – or at least come close together.

In Clandinin and Connelly's (1995) discussion of the professional knowledge landscape, they describe the "in-classroom place" and "out-of-classroom place". Classrooms are described as "places of action where teachers teach and curriculum is made," (p. 12). Further, they see classrooms as safe, private places for teachers. When "teachers leave their classrooms … they enter a public place (p. 14).

Peter, in certain ways, felt safer on the out-of-classroom place. There others could help the child and observe (monitor) Peter's behaviours. In this moment with Mandy, he was safer than in his classroom. He felt that he must be seen, with Mandy, only in public places.

Sexual activities are usually carried out in private places, in bedrooms. If children result, families may live in homes together. Even within families, sex is supposed to occur between consenting unrelated adults, not between parents and their offspring, or any adults and children.

When we refer to the school group as a family, we imagine "nice families", with a father, mother and children. In elementary schools, most teachers are women, and male teachers become father figures. But when we call up these images in school, we exclude the sex. We are a family but we do not sleep together here.

The classroom, with its privacy, is too private for male teachers. The classroom, with the closed door and private home metaphor, can be a place of danger for men. Peter brought Mandy down to the office, to a public place, so that others could help her.

It is strange that it is better for male teachers if they have "proven their masculinity" by impregnating a wife and raising children. This way the man is clearly heterosexual. But this must occur in a specific place, the private home, not at school with a staff member or student. So he is very much like other men, in that he engages in sex with women, which he can prove by displaying the child. The men teachers at Eastside, brought their wives and children to school, and were praised for doing so.

A photograph

Leafing through the December 2000/January 2001 issue of Educational Leadership, 58 (4), a photograph of a male teacher caught my eye (p. 34). The white, thirty-something, male teacher is sitting on a chair at a child's desk. A black boy sits on his lap while they look at the boy's work.

Something about the photograph causes me to cringe. Why would I respond that way, a male teacher who is researching male teachers? But somehow, the man in the picture looks creepy to me. Did I look like this to others when I first taught? The photographer is present so this situation is "safe", yet what if this man always encourages kids to sit on his lap? Or perhaps it was posed.

The article is about the growing diversity in American schools, not about male teachers, and the generic, un-credited, photograph seems to simply fill space on the page. It seems to accompany, rather than illustrate. No caption ties the photograph to the

article, and the teacher does not seem to be the author. Perhaps the male teacher and black child are meant to portray diversity. The article doesn't tell us.

This photograph reminded me that I hugged kids when I first taught, and they often sat on my lap. Anyone who knows children, knows that when young children are in the presence of adults they like and trust, they touch the adult on the arm, or move closer to sit on the adult's lap. In the classroom, I no longer allow them to sit on my lap. Sometimes I feel as if I am pushing them away.

Keith, one of the men in Sargent's (2000) study, stated that "Women's laps are places of love. Men's are places of danger" (p. 416). This represents the notion that women are safe and nurturing and men are dangerous. Even though I taught young children for years, my reaction to this photograph reveals my fear that the man's lap might be dangerous.

When I was in Eastside Elementary School I was always aware of the bodies of others. I noticed the spaces between myself and children. Children in the school tended to hug teachers quite easily, and many hugged me as they passed me in the hall. However, even in a school where kids felt comfortable hugging adults, I did not see any child sitting on an adult's lap. Children did not sit on the laps of women or men. So I can't help but wonder why the boy is sitting on the teacher's lap.

Perhaps he looks creepy to me simply because I don't know him. I don't know if he is like other men, or isn't like other men. I don't know who he is. I don't know how he is with children.

I wonder what this shows me about my shaping of my identity as a teacher. I describe myself as a teacher: it is who I am, as well as what I do. Yet, perhaps when I

look at this photograph, I am afraid that I see him, as others might see me. I am afraid that I might look creepy to someone who does not know me. So even though I trust my intentions, it is important to be aware of how I look to others. Thus, as King says, I monitor myself.

What is "typical"?

Through many conversations I recorded in the school, typical men were described as loud, brazen, uncaring, aloof and insensitive. In contrast, the men on this staff were described as kind, considerate men who were good with kids and loved their wives. Even Peter recognized that he was, in many ways, not typical. Everyone seemed to agree about the characteristics of "typical men".

While people attempted to describe Peter's qualities, they did so by describing men in negative terms.

I wonder about this image of men. I wonder what behaviours are "typical"? As I attended conferences throughout 1999 and 2001, I heard the term "hegemonic masculinity", and decided that this comes closest to describing "typical men."

Baca-Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Messner, in their introduction to the book Through the Prism of Difference: Reading on Sex and Gender, (1997), helped me to understand hegemonic masculinity by discussing Connell (1987, 1995). They write that "Connell argues that hegemonic masculinity (the dominant form of masculinity at any given moment) is constructed in relation to femininities as well as in relation to various subordinated or marginalized masculinities" (p. 4). Hegemonic masculinity, or the dominant form of masculinity, is basically white, middle class. When masculinity is constructed in relation to femininities, the kinds of issues faced by Peter when teaching

primary school, are brought forward. When I heard staff members describe "our men" as different from (and better than) the students' fathers, I think this showed masculinity constructed in terms of marginalized masculinities. In other words, teachers represent the dominant culture and the students' fathers represent marginalized masculinities. In the introduction, they go on to say that as "Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner (in this book) argue, this 'othering' of racialized masculinities helps to shore up the material privileges that have been historically connected to hegemonic masculinity" (p. 4). So even though Peter may be considered a feminized male because he teaches young children, he is also a member of the privileged group. Thus, he is a typical man. "When viewed this way, we can better understand hegemonic masculinity as part of a system that includes gender as well as racial, class, sexual, and other relations of power" (p. 4). This helps explain some of the contradictions I heard as people described Peter.

Can Peter be typical and not typical at the same time? Does he view himself as a member of the privileged group, as a representative of hegemonic masculinity?

In their article in the same volume, Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner (1997), describe the attitude of students in their university classes, who seemed to think that traditional men were "out there" and not in their classes.

> They are not us; we are the New Men, the Modern, Educated, and Enlightened Men. The belief that poor, working-class, and ethnic minority men are stuck in an atavistic, sexist 'traditional male role, while White, educated middle-class men are forging a more sensitive, egalitarian "new" or "Modern male role," is not uncommon. (p.58)

This appears to describe the attitude I heard in the school. The students' poor, working class fathers, were not like the men on staff, because they were stuck in the old ways of being male. However, as Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner reminded me, these conversations about the teachers on staff ignored their "structural positions of power and privilege" (p. 58). They are all, after all, White middle class men.

I wonder if rather than being "different from typical men", Peter showed us that masculinity is not fixed, but is "a social construction that shifts and changes over time as well as between and among various national and cultural contexts" (Baca-Zinn, Hondagneu-Sotelo, and Messner, 1997, p. 4). In this context, he represents an enlightened, "New Man". In other contexts, he represents other masculinities.

The comments I heard often expressed a fixed notion of masculinity and femininity, and the behaviours described represented a generally negative view of men. Peter showed me that there are many ways to be a man, indeed, there are many masculinities.

Being a father and a father figure

In Mandy's story, Peter did not help her himself, but called on a woman to help. He cared, and showed his caring by helping her, as much as he could. He did not abandon her.

I do not know if Mandy's father would have helped her, so I do not know if Peter behaved differently than the child's dad. However, whether or not Mandy's father would help her, he might not like Peter to help her. Peter would certainly help his own daughter, but perhaps would not want his daughter's male teacher, if she had one, to help her change. As a father, Peter could do some things that he could not do as a father figure.

This is not what staff members meant when they indicated that the men on staff were different from the students' fathers. While many staff thought the male teachers were different from the students' fathers, they explained that the male teachers provided more positive models of male ways of being. However, I see that certain behaviours that are acceptable at home, are not acceptable at school. Mandy's story revealed a moment when the male teacher could not behave like the "good father" while at school. It would not be acceptable if Peter played with students as a father might, such as "roughhousing" on the floor. He could not rock a little girl while she goes to sleep. He could not help Mandy change her clothes.

This reveals the complexity Peter lived out in his daily work. Peter was like typical men in many ways, yet was described as unlike typical men. In this instance he felt forced to keep his distance when Mandy needed help, yet was valued for his ability to show his connections with kids. He could not actually do what "good fathers" might do at home, yet was valued as a positive father figure. I saw that it was not the action itself, that was problematic. It was the context and the relationships. With these people in this place, he could not act in certain ways. None of these boundaries on his behaviours were obvious or visible. How was he to know what to do?

For Peter, he knew what to do when "there is something inside of you that feels uncomfortable and you listen to that inner voice" (Peter, taped conversation, February 4, 2000). His inner voice served him well that day, but I wonder if can he rely on that inner voice each time. I wonder when his inner voice is not enough.

Embodied knowledge

Mandy's wet pants reminded me that bodies were present. In schools, many bodies come together in small spaces, yet learning is supposed to occur in the minds. We rarely talk about body (or less often about spirit) in discussions about teaching and learning, as if curriculum needs only brains. Yet we each have a body, live in a body, and our bodies take us to school, where we meet other bodies. We teach through our bodies, as Weber and Mitchell (1999) remind me.

> Teaching necessarily occurs through the body. Although its presence is obvious, the 'teacher-body' is too often neglected, avoided, or taken for granted in an uncritical manner.
>
> However, the way the body and its various features are conceptualized, manifested, interpreted, and lived depends very much on prevailing cultural norms. Are teachers thought to be exempt from all this? Is the body not essential to both our sense of self and our teaching identity and practice? (Weber and Mitchell, 1999, p. 125)

If the body is essential to our sense of self and our teaching identity, how is the *male* body essential to Peter's teaching identity and sense of self? Peter and I noticed how his *male* body influenced the ways he could offer support to Mandy. In this research project I reflected on how perceptions of maleness influence the reactions of others to Peter's presence in the classroom. I wonder if the teacher-body is usually taken for granted because elementary teachers are predominately women. When the teacher-body is male, others notice.

This study has caused me to re-consider "embodied knowledge". Clandinin and Connelly (1986) state that teacher knowledge "is embodied, experiential and reconstructed out of the narratives of their classroom life" (p. 383). I realize that I never thought of this knowledge as embodied in my *male* body. I read "embodied" in a disembodied way. Now I notice that Peter's male body informed his teaching practice. Embodied knowing must consider the gender of the bodies and the nature of the work.

Mitchell and Weber (1999) go on to state that not only do teachers teach through their bodies, but "students learn (or fail to learn) through theirs! In classrooms around the world, students are made to sit for long hours in hard chairs, overcoming their physical discomfort through force of mind, ostensibly concentrating on their lessons" (p. 127). I now see that in our conversations about Mandy, none of us, except her mother, wondered how Mandy felt that morning. We did not wonder whether Mandy failed to learn her math? Only her mother alerted Peter to the possibility that Mandy might not like school. I had noticed her physical appearance, and wondered about her physical health. She may have been concentrating on her lesson before she wet herself, but did not concentrate on her lesson after. She put her head down and cried.

What is clear, however, is that on February 4th, Mandy's body was present in school. But what did she learn?

<u>The second panel: This School is a Sacred Place</u>

While I taped conversations with parents and staff, I heard repeatedly that this school was special. I heard that you could sit beside anyone in the staff room, that they had a mission and that this building was a safe and caring place for kids. I listened to the

words used by staff and parents, such as believe, safe, caring, compassion, committed, connected, support, haven, every child, responsibility. While thinking about Eastside Elementary School as a special place, I realized that schools, in our culture, are viewed as sacred places. This school is sacred in the sense that it is valued and honored by staff, students and parents as a gateway to the future. It is sacred because it belongs to the legacy of public schools which were developed to prepare the child for "a responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship among people..." (Article 28, The United Nations, Rights of the Child).

How did the special school, embracing a sacred place, influence Mandy's unfolding story?

This Sacred Place was precarious for Peter

For Peter, the school continued to be a sacred place. This story did not threaten his belief about children, education or this school. But he saw that his position in that place is always precarious.

He felt supported by the secretaries and principal when he needed their help. He felt supported by our conversations since I was part of his landscape. While he felt frustrated with the women teachers in the staff room when they did not understand his situation, he continued to like them, because they were his friends. He could still sit beside anyone in the staff room and openly share his teaching stories.

However, while he could sit beside anyone in the staffroom, he could not go beyond that closed door. In an instant his safe place in this school became precarious. The door revealed the wall that separated him from the child, and from the women on

staff. At that moment his safety depended upon separation. He was safe because the door was closed.

The community supported Mandy. She was not sent home wet and uncomfortable but was assisted by several staff members. The school provided a safe and caring place for Mandy, a living example of their belief that all teachers felt responsible for all children.

I do not know what Mandy's parents thought. A few weeks later, they vanished before I met them. One day, Mandy and her sister did not turn up for school, and later the secretary learned they moved. Their view of the sacred place is unknown.

Other parents such as Peggy, Albert and Janine, who described Peter or the school in such positive terms, had known him for longer than the three months that Mandy was present in this class. So perhaps Mandy's parents did not have time to feel the school's special-ness. On the other hand, two weeks after the event, Mandy's mother sent a cake for the Valentine's Day party.

Greene (1995) writes that individual identity "takes form in the contexts of relationship and dialogue; our concern must be to create the kinds of contexts that nurture – for all children – a sense of worthiness and agency" (p. 41). I see that Peter worked in this kind of context, I am not sure about Mandy.

Caring hands

Later, in the same conversation about Mandy, Peter, who is trained in first aid, talked about touching children in an emergency.

I even had girls come to me because they feel they've scraped their back and I haven't lifted up the back of their shirt to look at their back. Mind you when a girl has fallen off the climber, and is laying there in pain, I'm not going to say "get up and go see a female teacher" I'm going to be the one dealing with it.

There's something that supercedes an issue like that, and that's called concern for your life and your health and it's an emergency situation. If I had to feel around for broken bones and sometimes you have to lift up their shirt - and I would do that I wouldn't wait – to say "go get a female teacher". I'm the one who has first aid training and I would do it. Whatever the consequences there's something called this is an emergency first aid situation and that would supercede any sexual issues. I would be very surprised if they ever came up in that situation.

The first thing you do in first aid is a body check and you feel their body. If they're lying there and can barely move you got to assess where they hurt. You don't touch their breasts or anything like that but you have to check their arms, their back, their buttocks area, so my hands would be all over their body, their stomach, even down here for internal bleeding you have to check the firmness all the way down to your pelvic area. I would do it, no question, and I don't think anyone would question. To me, the emergency situation is not tricky at all. (Peter, taped conversation, February 4, 2000)

I wonder if it would be so clear! While discussing Mandy, he noted that "up until just an hour ago, that would all have been theoretical." This conversation with me has brought these issues forward. Our conversations have shaped his awareness. After Mandy, and if he needs to deal with a hurt child, how might he react? Before beginning his first aid response, will he stop for a split second and make sure other teachers are present? His hands are allowed to examine a child in one situation, but were regarded as threatening and dangerous by Claudette's parents in the next story. I wonder if he will stop for a brief moment and reconsider his actions when facing an injured child.

Mandy's "incident" had impact on this research as well. This opened up our conversations about the complexity of relationships between men and children. Without Mandy, we might not have talked about issues around hands, touch, children, caring and the fears lying just underneath the surface of Peter's daily life.

An element of truth

This was not the only incident that reminded Peter that he could easily fall from grace. Another incident with a different child, Claudette, scared him more than this

incident, because the incident involved accusations that contained an element of truth. In this story, the school was NOT a safe place for Peter.

One day when I arrived for our meeting I could tell he was distracted or upset by something and I wondered for a moment whether I should not intrude. I asked him if he still wanted to talk, and to tape the conversation. He wanted to, saying, "This is important."

He began by telling me he was photocopying early that morning when Claudette's mother arrived at the door.

I was at the photocopier and she said 'we need to talk' and I said "okay" and I went in the hallway and she said "no, can we talk privately" and that right away got my heart racing, thinking 'what what?' so we went in one of the offices, and she said Claudette said that I was yelling at her, that I grabbed her, that I had hurt her and she was emotional and said "I have witnesses, this is what my daughter said", and it was a very accusatory tone...her tone, her manner, her intonation, were all that she believed that, she was basically saying that, it happened, and she said, "My husband is so livid about it I told him not to come."

That's how she introduced the whole thing. I said "Before anything else, I need to get the principal in on this conversation, I can't talk about it unless she is here, this is serious enough that I need her here". (Peter, taped conversation, January 28, 2000)

Any teacher would ask for the support of the principal in this situation. However, I cannot help but notice the similarity between this story and Mandy's. Peter must ensure that others are present when faced with parents or children in a crisis. The sacred place must support him.

I went to see Adelina and when I tried to tell her about it I started crying, because I was so shocked,... I was flabbergasted, I was feeling very much accused, the first thing that ran through my mind was ' well, my teaching career is over, here we go, my career is over and it just started." I took a deep breath and tried to get control, Adelina went to talk to her first and then I went down, to talk.

I remembered when I grabbed her by the arm, it wasn't in anger, she was running down the hallway and I was trying to talk to her. I was saying, "Claudette, Claudette,"

and she wasn't hearing me and I reached out and I nabbed her as she was twirling and whirling down the hallway like she does, and I said to her "listen you need to stop."

Now she was being so silly and so disruptive in the hallway and noisy and screaming and running down the hallway, that I said "you are out of control, you need to stop right now." And I said it in a very firm voice, and she had pushed me all day, and so I might have said it a little more strongly, and her sister was in the library, and they heard me...but my voice carries, I don't have to be yelling and they hear me next door, so her sister and her friends, those three, when they went home, they were the witnesses, based on something they had overheard. And I was thinking, a teacher can be so easily ruined, it goes on your record and you could have trouble getting a job anywhere. (Peter, taped conversation, January 28, 2000)

The witnesses had only heard Peter's voice in the hallway. By the time the children arrived home, the event took on a larger meaning. The family read the event in other ways than did Peter. They felt it necessary to confront the teacher, in addition, the father was so livid that he was asked to stay home. What might have happened, had he arrived in the photocopy room that morning?

By the end of the conversation, her mother apologized to Peter for jumping so quickly to conclusions, and agreed that her child comes home with only one version of any story. She apologized for upsetting Peter, and said she would come in to the classroom to volunteer. They agreed that they need to communicate regularly about her child. Later, the principal told me that in her meeting with Claudette's mother, the conversation turned to Claudette's school difficulties, and to other problems at home. Claudette was not progressing in her learning, and was displaying many off-task behaviours. While her mother was aware of these concerns and was seeking guidance from the school, she also responded with blame. When the child came home with the grabbing and yelling story, she responded emotionally.

So even though the meeting ended on a positive note, and the parent, teacher and administrative team came to agreement, I asked Peter how he felt now.

Scared. I feel scared. I think this will happen again and I wonder will they come in and ask? It scares me that a child can be so starved for attention that they will not even think, because they don't understand ruining someone's career. I really feel scared, it is a reminder how precarious our position is. And for a male, I think that in society males have the stereotype of being aggressive, not being able to work with young kids, and males being angry, so if it's going to happen, of course it will happen in a male's class. So it scares me because my voice carries, if I grab someone I could hurt them, and when you hear of offenders it's almost always men, and there is a stereotype that makes it particularly dangerous for males, and it is a very big issue for me that I can't even feel that I can be real... (Peter, taped conversation, January 28, 2000)

Even though Jeff's parents praised Peter for being "real", he felt he could not be real, he must always be on guard.

King (1995) writes that primary teachers feel they must "be there" for the children. Being truly present seems essential to forming genuine relationships. Annette, for example, praised him for being himself when she stated that "...just by watching him teach you can tell that what he is here, he is at home" (Annette, taped conversation, January 6, 2000). Yet Peter felt that he could not "be real" in the classroom, could not be himself.

At that moment, the school did not feel safe to Peter. His position felt precarious, and if the child's parents had decided to pursue him, he wondered whether they could have ruined his career. This school was described as a safe place for kids, but did not feel safe that day, to the teacher.

I wondered if this one event this one day changed him. His answer portrayed his ambivalence and confusion.

I certainly will not give someone a hug – but yesterday a child came in and knocked off my tarantula magnet and broke another leg off she was so upset and crying that I hugged her, and all the other kids were around... I don't think I'm going to change that. But I will not ever touch a student if I am alone, if I have to talk to someone firmly I will not restrain them I will stand in front of them or I will call another teacher and ask for help. I will watch how I restrain or touch someone.

If someone is going to say 'he touched me inappropriately', it's not done in public, it's done in secret. (Peter, taped conversation, January 28, 2000)

First he stated that he would not hug a child, then remembering a recent incident when he comforted a crying girl, retracted. Then he thought he would ask others for help, and thought that usually sexual misconduct occurs in private, so he would be safe from those accusations. Again, Peter experienced contradictions in his life.

The real fear in this story was that Claudette told the truth, he had grabbed her and he had raised his voice. He instantly concluded that this would be different for women teachers.

The fear here is there is an ounce of truth, I did talk to her firmly and yes I did hold her, but taken to the nth degree it becomes a lie. It is an ounce of truth and a pound of lie. We talk about equality in education, in terms of males and females and we need more males and you know what, males do have that stacked against them, and I will say we come with the cards stacked against us.

It's the same stereotype that says men are burly, rough uncaring, the same stereotype that we need more men in elementary and the same stereotype that makes it dangerous. And it's a catch-22, it's like we want it, but we don't, we need it, but we don't. (Peter, taped conversation, January 28, 2000)

King (2000) tells us that for the men in his study, discipline was "preconfigured for them as male, authority based, and threatening (to others)" (p. 12). The assumption is that men were "better able to provide 'problem' students with needed discipline" (p.12). Peter, in our first conversations, noted that people assumed he could provide discipline for certain students. However, this story revealed the dangerous side of this. The very characteristics that create this aura of male discipline – loud deep voice, rough hands, are the same characteristics representing male danger.

This incident shaped Peter's teaching. Even when he protested that he would not change or society has won, he will likely change. Peter will be more careful. This

incident will add to the dozens of other small school events that shape Peter's work. The fear he felt does not "go away". He may become afraid of the students and their parents.

This school is a special place for staff and students. Yet, at the same time, this man felt threatened. Even though the administrative team and other teachers supported him, he still felt threatened. He wondered if this place could protect an innocent man. I wonder - how sacred is the place?

Ethic of Care

King, in his (1998) book entitled Uncommon Caring, discusses these issues at length. He points out that while "caring is an important aspect of teaching at all levels, love and care, as well as other nurturing behaviors, are privileged attributes of primary teaching. Care is synonymous with primary teaching." (p.12). In our culture, caring is attributed to women, and caring for children is viewed as women's work. Indeed, primary teachers are predominately women. But as King points out, if primary teaching is read as caring, and caring signifies a female way of knowing, then men who choose to teach in these classrooms may be at risk" (p. 3). This story showed that Peter, a man with a strong ethic of care (Noddings, 1992), needed to monitor how he demonstrated his care.

This story also revealed that caring, in primary classrooms, is often interpreted to mean the adults should be warm and "huggy" people, who are "nice". Men who do not wish to hug may feel that they do not belong with young children. (Sargent, 2000). However, when Noddings states that the ethic of care emphasizes "living together, on creating, maintaining and enhancing positive relations" (p.21), she does not tell us that teachers and students should hug each other. She states that "the need for care in our

present culture is acute", (p. xi) and that we should "educate our children not only for competence, but for also caring" (p. xiv).

As a primary teacher and father of sons myself, and knowing not only Peter Thompson but my other male friends, I know that men are capable of care and can show caring in multiple ways. Perhaps Peter Thompson's story can show us that caring for young children is interpreted as hugging and touching, then this is a limited interpretation.

How care is expressed is complex. It seems to me that if men are to play a role in elementary schools, everyone, men and women, must explore multiple interpretations of caring.

Peter cared very much for Mandy that day. He read her body, sitting hunched over the table with her head cradled in her arms. I saw him sit on a chair beside her to find out what was wrong. He did not know then what had happened and he immediately focused on her while I took the others to their coats in the hall. He brought her to the nurse's room, with her bag of spare clothes and ensured that she wasn't alone. He called her mother. He could not be accused of not caring.

The third panel: The Reluctant Superhero

I heard that Peter was amazing, he had changed lives, he did wonders and that he put himself into his work. I called him a superhero after I "added up" the comments I heard. I called him reluctant, because he did not seek superhero status, it was laid upon him by others. I thought about the characteristics of superheroes: they have powers, a weakness, a mission, and a disguise.

In Peter's case, both his powers and weakness reside in his male body. The identical teaching skills in a female elementary teacher would be commendable, but she would not be a superhero.

His weakness revealed

His weakness was revealed the instant Mandy wet her pants in class. He was placed on the other side of the door. He was unable to help. Not only that, if he had helped her, he could have been suspected of improper behaviour. Even though he was valued for his differences, and working in a sacred place, he was powerless for these few moments.

In superhero tales, the Evil Enemies attempt to use the superhero's weakness against him, to their advantage. In this case, Mandy was unaware of her effect on the superhero. She did not act intentionally. Her young body was unable to cooperate with the demands of the school. However, no matter what her intentions, Peter's responses were just as real.

Mandy, like Claudette, seemed to possess an inordinate power. She had the power to place the teacher on the other side of the door, and the potential to affect his career. His life work, his career goals, his mission as a teacher, his very income to support his family, are all dependent upon the children. He would not be an elementary teacher without them. His male body provides him with additional status, the possibility of changing lives, being a father figure and male role model. So his body was simultaneously the source of his powers and his weakness. They are closely linked, contributing to the precarious nature of his life in school.

Thinking about Peter as a superhero forces me to think about "power". Because men are associated with power in our patriarchal society, it is no surprise that superheroes are usually men.

A look at his power

Writing about the portrayal of men in history text books, Kuzmic (2000) states that central "to the definition and the very existence of patriarchy is the notion of power… Quite simply, to be a man is to possess and exercise power" (p. 118). These powers are usually exhibited as powers over another, and "is something that is done to others and is embedded in a configuration of unequal relations between those who hold powers and those who don't" (p. 118). This reminded me of the superhero in stories: he always displays power over the Evil Enemies. A superhero has clearly defined powers, and performs his deeds in ways that demonstrate his power over another. The superhero subdues evil people, saves innocent people and changes the course of history. Even when he disguises himself as an ordinary citizen, we, the readers, know he is powerful. One of the "primary ways masculinity gets defined through prominent individuals in textbooks has to do with power…" (p. 119), as shown through the exploits of military and political leaders.

In this study, I named Peter a superhero, based on taped conversations with others in the school. I see now that the "superherofication" of Peter reveals the patriarchal perspective on power. Just as women are rarely superheroes, women teachers are never superheroes. They are "only" superhuman. Women are expected to demonstrate their ability to care for children, to maintain the domestic sites and to look after others. That

may be superhuman, but that is expected of women. The difference is in the power. As Kuzmic states, "to be a man is to possess and exercise power" (p. 119).

Peter, as a male, has power over others: children, (women) teachers, illiteracy and "old masculinity" (since he is the embodiment of "new masculinity"). He has the power to change destiny, as expressed by the parents of children in his class.

But I see an essential dichotomy: if he is a superhero, can he be a "New Man"? Is not the superhero an embodiment of hegemonic masculinity? I wonder how he can demonstrate different ways of being masculine and give up the possession of power.

In addition, in superhero stories, the domestic does not exist. We never see superheroes perform domestic tasks. We never see superheroes doing ordinary things such as eating, cooking, sleeping or watching videos on Saturday night with their children. They do not experience love, have partners or live in a house.

Some superheroes are seen working, but only as part of their "disguise" to hide their secret identity. To hide his identity as a superhero, he takes on a career, such as reporter or millionaire philanthropist, but never as a house husband or school teacher. For Peter, the workplace does not create his secret identity as an ordinary citizen, but rather his work is where he becomes the superhero. When he leaves the building he becomes an ordinary citizen.

To be a superhero means to live a split existence, as one identity must always hide the other identity. Thus the superhero cannot allow himself to fall in love, or raise children, because the ongoing relationships would threaten his hidden identity. In many ways, Peter lived this split existence by being super at school and real at home.

As Kuzmic (2000) points out in his study of history texts, men are defined as public figures. Public and private "are viewed as separate, dichotomized realms" (p. 121) and the public realm of men is associated with reason, mind and knowledge. The private realm is associated with passion, desire and body. Women look after the private realm of home and family.

This is precisely why Peter cannot fulfil this role: he cannot be a superhero in the private, domestic world of women and children unless he is simply saving them from disaster. There are no superheroes in the domestic private world, only in the public world. As an ordinary teacher, he is not super. Simultaneously, many expect him to be a superhero.

What would the other parents say?

As I reflected on Mandy's needs, or about Claudette's yelling and grabbing story, I thought about other parents such as Peggy, Albert and Janine. Peggy was the first parent I met, who told me that Peter "did wonders for my son" (taped conversation, September 24, 1999) and started me thinking about his status as a superhero. Peggy expressed such faith in Peter's work with her son that she wanted Ellen, her daughter, in his class. Albert and Janine, Jeff's parents, told me that Mr. Thompson was "the greatest thing since sliced bread" (taped conversation, March 14, 2000), who showed the students that teachers are ordinary people.

Neither of these parents had difficulties with this teacher. Albert and Janine thought he was completely approachable and Peggy stopped in after school at least once a week to talk to Peter. Peter did not need to call these parents after a crisis, because no crises occurred. He did not yell at or grab their children. If he needed to speak to either of

them about classroom behaviour, the parents would respond with support. In fact, Peggy was often expressing her concerns about Ellen's classroom work and behaviours, and wanted Peter to treat her firmly. If she heard that Peter had spoken harshly at Ellen, she would come in to find out what Ellen had done. She would trust his reactions to Ellen. She would likely say she must have deserved it.

The parents of both Mandy and Claudette lacked communication with him. While both Ellen and Jeff would be described as "good" children who loved school, Claudette and Mandy were experiencing difficulties and did not like school.

With Ellen and Jeff, (and their parents) Peter was a superhero. With Mandy and Claudette, he was not. As a teacher, he needs to figure out how to support the learning of each child, while each child shapes Peter in different ways.

A Superhero has a mission

While the Program of Studies for Alberta, defines the program's vision as "optimizing human potential". Peter's personal mission sounded very similar, when he stated that our goal as teachers "is to try to raise, and help develop, well adjusted kids who are responsible contributors to society" (taped conversation, January 12, 2000).

Everyone agreed that Peter teaches because he has a mission. For example, Albert and Janine told me that "he's not here for the job - he puts himself into his work" (taped conversation, March 14, 2000).

Yet, when confronted with Mandy's wet pants, Peter turned over her direct care to the secretaries. The door between Mandy and Peter revealed the limits of his involvement with this child. He brought her bag of extra clothes, waited nearby and called her parents. He did as much as he could and did not abandon her. But did he help her become a well

adjusted kid? Will his influence help her become a responsible contributor to society, or optimize her human potential? We do not know.

Investigating one tiny event is unfair. Yet this reminds me that teachers can become mired in the tiny, everyday events, and never see the life-long. Mandy entered and exited Peter's classroom quickly. Unless Peter meets her later, he will never know how he influenced her life.

I wonder if Peter will maintain these lofty missions? He entered teaching with enthusiasm and joy. His shaping is influenced by children such as Mandy. While mothers such as Peggy often told him that he was a great teacher, he barely met Mandy's mom, and all she said was that Mandy did not like school.

One tiny story will not destroy his mission, but over time, the thousands of stories certainly influence his mission. His status as superhero becomes more precarious.

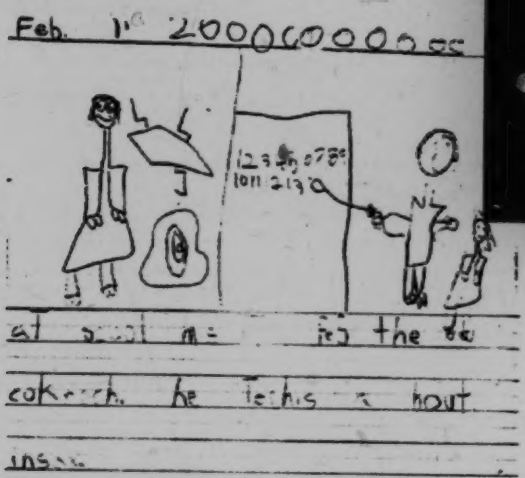
8. Valentine's Cards Carry So Many Messages

Valentines - a flood of attention.

The cards from the children surprised me,
the evidence of my place in their classroom,

By pasting their cards in my journal
they become "data" and I wonder -
what did the children intend to say?

"Be my Valentine"
holds many messages inside.



Valentine Cards

The Valentines from children surprised me – evidence of my place in their classroom, evidence of children expressing their – what? – care? affection? I pasted the envelops to include their original printing – their "fingerprint" – in my journal. I find myself moving closer into relationship with some of the individuals. I like them!

Valentine's Day made me think about the "flood of attention" that the Assistant Principal talked about. Teachers are supposed to show compassion, caring, commitment and community and yet men have limits placed on their showing.

(Journal entry, February 16, 2000)

Two weeks before February 14th Peter gave his students a class list, and reminded them to give a card to each student in class. Each child decorated a large envelope, and when classmates brought their cards, they delivered them into the envelopes. This took a few minutes at the beginning of each morning and I helped some children read the names on the cards. Peter knew he would attend a system literacy workshop on the morning of Valentine's Day, so he wrote plans for the substitute that included special crafts. He and the other grade one teacher decided not to ask parents to send food, because they wanted to keep the afternoon simple. They planned a group story time, independent reading, time to open their cards and a video. They intended this to be a simple and calm day.

When I was a child in the late 1950s I remember carrying a bag of Valentines to school to deliver to classmates. After the party I brought the cards I received home and pinned them on my bedroom wall. It was a child's day then. I don't recall the adults in my life exchanging cards, and I don't think my parents went out for a romantic dinner. This wasn't a day for romance, just for friendship. In junior high school we held a Valentine's dance, and during my adolescent years I began to associate Valentine's Day with romance, red hearts with red lingerie.

Peter Thompson also remembered his childhood Valentine's Days. As he handed out his class list two weeks before Valentine's Day, he told his class this story about his own childhood Valentine's Days. He told his students a story that is much different from mine. He typed out the following and gave it to me.

Valentines

In February, I told a story like the one below to my grade one class. I typically tell it every year although most kids give cards to everyone in class. This is how I told the story.

I want to tell you a true Valentine's story about a boy that I know. When the boy was in elementary school the kids in the class gave out valentines just like we do. They could give cards to anyone they wanted. The boy was always nervous and anxious about a week before Valentine's Day. He put up his pouch like everyone else, all nicely decorated. At first everyone had empty pouches, but soon the others began to fill up.

The boy knew that he could count on at least a few valentines. He would get one from each of his two friends and one from his teacher. He could count on that. He always gave out cards to everyone. A few days before the big day, the other kids' pouches would get full, but not his. He would have two from his friends. He would start to feel bad and would write two or three to himself. The next day he would get one from his teacher.

Then the big day would arrive. The other kids would bring their overflowing pouches back to their desks and then go back and pick up the ones that fell on the floor. The boy would get his skinny, flat pouch and quietly sit at his own desk. He would open the one from his teacher and the two from his friends. Then he would slowly look around. The other kids had hardly started on their pouches. Very slowly, taking as much time as he could, the boy opened the couple that he had written himself. Then he would sit quietly, embarrassed, with tears in his eyes as the others opened the rest of theirs. The boy hated Valentine's Day. He felt like nobody really liked him. He knew this but on this day everyone else knew it too.

At this point I asked them if they knew the boy. I told them it was me. Point: please give a valentine to everyone or don't give them at all. (Peter, personal note, February 14, 2000)

When he told me this story, I felt shocked. I felt shocked that his teachers didn't tell students to bring a card for every classmate, shocked that he suffered such cruelty at the hands of his peers, shocked that he would share this story with me and shocked to see a new image of Peter as a child. I suddenly saw him as a kid in my class, one of the shy little boys with few friends. In addition, the other stories he had told me about himself dropped into place in my mind.

That week I wrote about this in my journal.

When I think about this image: Peter as a child receiving no Valentines in school, Peter playing with little kids at church, Peter working with young children now and admired by the women in this elementary school – the outsider finds a place. This shocks me for many reasons. The unpopular shy little boy who was afraid of his grade five teacher grows up to become a teacher of young children, a caregiver, a saint. Yet, his maleness roars out of him in his size and his voice. I think of school as a safe place for children and this school is a safe place for him.

(Journal entry, Feb 16, 2000)

Why did he tell his students this story? He wanted to ensure that each child received many cards. He told me that after he shared this story, some children assured him that they would bring him a card. "That's not the point", he told me. "The point is for the kids to bring a card for all the other kids in class." He wanted to ensure that his classroom was a safe place, that all were included in the community. He expressed this desire by telling his story.

The day arrived and Peter attended the literacy workshop that morning. He arrived at lunch only to discover that Teddy, the classroom pet tarantula, had died.

Feb 14
Noon – the tarantula is dead. Peter is quite upset about it – he phoned the pet shop to ask questions (about possible causes of death). He told his team partner, everyone in the office and the staffroom. One teacher suggested maybe it was too cold (in this school at night).

Telling the class: talking for 5-10 minutes about him. All the possible reasons he died: too cold in here, he might have had trouble shedding, crawling out of his skin. He said I will get another one, we'll try again with a heat lamp. Any questions? Can we hold him? No, but sit in a circle and I will show him to you.

(Field notes, Feb. 14, 2000)

The tarantula had not eaten and rarely moved for several weeks. Peter called the pet store several times for advice and they suggested perhaps the spider was shedding or could be ill. That Valentine's Day noon hour, when Peter arrived, Teddy was dead.

Meanwhile, several parents arrived with cupcakes or other treats for the afternoon. Peter had not invited anyone to send treats and, after explaining the death of Teddy, was in no mood for a party. For the first half-hour he insisted that each child choose a book and read quietly alone. I sat with one child and listened to her read.

He decided to take the class to the art room to eat the snacks, because there was no carpet on the floor, making it easier to sweep. I carried the snacks down to the art room, and organized paper towels for napkins while Peter organized the children. Soon they were seated around four tables eating their snacks. The children chatted happily to each other but Peter continued to be out of sorts. After eating the snacks and opening their cards, both grade one classes met in the library to watch a video and I took the opportunity to visit other classrooms.

When I visited her classroom, the assistant principal told me that the children receive a flood of attention on Valentine's Day. She believed that this is one day when everyone in the class recognizes everyone else, as members of the community. In another classroom, the teacher made a friendship salad. All the children brought an item for the salad, which was mixed in a large glass bowl. Meanwhile, the grade sixes took their snacks and music to the gymnasium where they all stood around in little groups, listening to loud music, striving to look like teenagers. Finally, the afternoon came to an end.

Later that weekend, when I pasted my cards in the journal, many images stayed in my mind: cards, snacks, the dead spider, and the "flood of attention". I wrote in my

journal that while teachers "are supposed to show compassion, caring, commitment, community, and yet men have limits placed on their showing" (journal entry, February 16, 2000). How did Peter show caring, or limit his showing, on this special day? How does the story of Valentine's Day reveal other sides of the shaping of who Peter is?

Mandy's story seemed to disrupt the three strong stories, at the same time revealing important aspects of his shaping. Valentine's Day was different.

In the next sections, I discuss ways in which the three strong stories interacted with each other. Here, Peter displayed his differences, the classroom became sacred and he was the superhero that many described.

Difference, sacred and superhero: Teddy's death brings them together

On the surface, Valentine's Day in Peter's class was similar to the others in this school. In every class, the children brought cards for each child, parents sent snacks, everyone ate and opened cards.

Upon Peter's arrival that afternoon, he brought a conversation of death to the children in a gentle, thoughtful way. When the children asked if they could hold the dead spider, he said "no, but sit in a circle and I will show him to you." They each looked at Teddy's lifeless body. Meanwhile, I was thinking 'all this fuss over a bug?? A spider? Who cares!'

Yet, when even a lowly spider died in the classroom, Peter demonstrated his caring to the children. He showed them that he cared about life, he demonstrated the sacredness of life. When he brought creatures into his classroom he looked after them, providing food, shelter and safety. He cared about them.

While Mandy's story placed a door between Peter and the child, Teddy's story brought Peter and the other children together in a sacred circle. They sat close to each other and spoke in hushed voices. Here Peter could demonstrate sensitivity to the needs of the children. He could also care *for* the spider's body in ways he could not for Mandy's body. He could demonstrate gentleness and touching. Allowing creatures in the class, allows Peter opportunities to show caring.

I look at the photo of hands (at the beginning of this section) carefully cradling the tarantula. Do they look like a man's hands? Or is that only because I know him that I know they are a man's hands. The hands demonstrate caring for a creature. In this classroom, these hands zipped coats, corrected math work, wrote stories on chart paper, demonstrated crafts and held books to read. Hands, in this classroom, provided help and comfort. These hands were safe for insects and children. They were the hands of a superhero, a man who could deal with death and life at the same moment.

When I look at this photograph, I think again about the term "embodied knowledge". Peter's knowledge of teaching, bugs, children and Valentine's Day is embodied in these hands as they cradled the spider.

Why did he have a spider, an African Millipede and two cockroaches in the class? He has not always known about insects. His interest developed while teaching grade one, because he noticed that grade one children often loved bugs. He began to read books to the students, and encouraged them to bring local common insects, such as ladybugs and beetles, into the classroom. This awakened his fascination and he soon began to read about insects for his own knowledge and pleasure. Gradually he became known as an expert by children as well as by staff. Now in class he read books about insects, showed

pictures and posters, explained insect life cycles and habits. He kept unusual creatures in glass containers for the children to watch.

When he talked about feeding and cleaning them, and creating an environment in the containers, he demonstrated caring. He brought life to the classroom. They were his gift. He shared his knowledge.

So, for all these reasons, the death of this creature was a significant event to Peter. He felt sad. He showed the children that he felt sad, by crying real tears. He felt passion.

It was more than a teachable moment.

In this research, I heard, over and over again, that men teachers were different from women teachers, that Peter brought a different perspective, in addition to being a role model. Yet, I saw moments like this when gender was not obvious. His team partner would not have done anything differently if her classroom pet died. Unlike the day Mandy wet her pants, he did not need to call on the secretaries to help. In daily classroom life, Peter and his female colleagues were often more the same than they were different.

When describing Peter, this love of insects was cited by other teachers as something a man would bring to school. Yet, when the spider died, he showed his sadness. The boys and girls alike, experienced the moment together. They sat in a circle, boy beside girl, and focused on the lifeless body in Mr. Thompson's hand.

Thorne (1997) says that children's "gender relations can be understood only if we map the full array of their interactions – occasions when boys and girls are together as well as those when they separate" (p. 44). In Teddy's circle, I saw a moment when boys and girls, were together. At other times, later on the same afternoon, I also saw moments when they were separate. In this study, I saw moments when the adults were together, as

well as moments when they were separate. While on one hand, teachers said the Peter brought a different perspective to the staff, on the other hand, they said gender did not matter.

Messner (2000), writing about a year when his son played soccer, observed that parents never noticed all the similarities between girl and boy soccer players. They instead, noted the differences. It is an example, he says, "where we collectively 'see' aspects of social reality that tell us a truth that we prefer to believe, such as the belief in categorical sex differences" (p. 771). Even though we might view gender as performance, which "analytically foregrounds the agency of individuals in the construction of gender, thus highlighting the fluidity of gender," (p. 769) we continue to see what we prefer to see.

In this study, I could not see that men and women had different "essential natures". However, I heard many who believed men and women teachers were different, and then differences were observed. For example, as long as parents believed Peter made a difference because he was a man, then, he did. As parents and teachers acted in certain ways towards Peter's maleness, he seemed to become more male to fit their actions. He was shaped as a male role model and father figure. His interest in insects was seen as a male interest.

But I ask myself, along with Thorne, two other related questions. "Is gender always relevant? Do some parts of social life transcend it?" (p. 47).

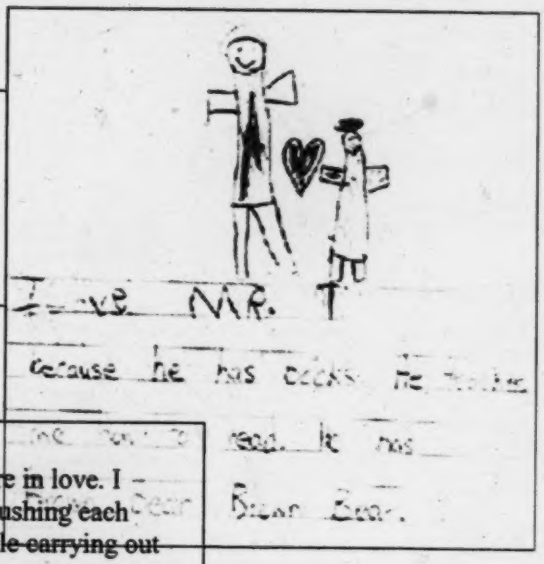
I cannot answer these with certainty. But during these special moments in Peter's classroom, it seemed like we transcended gender. It did not appear to matter. It was not on the surface.

Expressions of love

In this classroom, Valentine's Day was not the only day I heard expressions of love. While I sat in the classroom, I noted the relationships between the children within the first two weeks of school.

"Can I tell you a secret? I love Nina. Because she dresses nicely."

Field notes, August, 1999

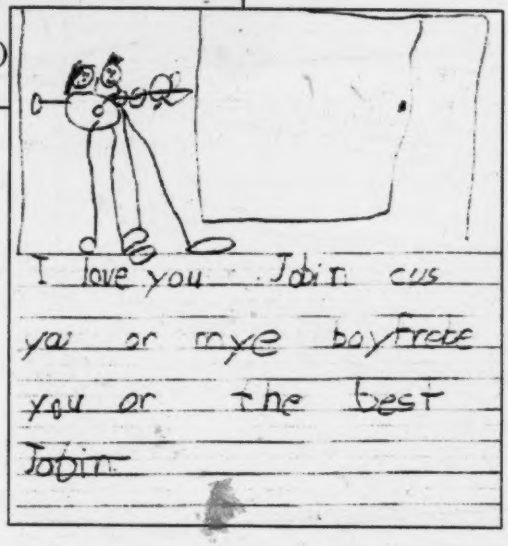


Candace, Jeffey and Nina are in love. I watched them touching, hugging, pushing each other for an hour this morning (while carrying out their work).

When they walked close to me, one said "We love Jeffey." He then told me "I love them!" "Why?" (I asked him). He turned to Candace and said "because she's cute and stronger than me". They moved away from me.

(Journal entry, August 25, 1999)

Ellen chased Jobin at recess and wrote this note. I did not see them together at any other time. She also received a note from a different boy that said "Dear Ellen, You are prity".



These expressions of love are directed towards the teacher as well. Many of the children say they love their teacher.

Even the secretary, when talking to Peggy, had used the expression, "He's wonderful, you'll love him."

We had just moved to the city after leaving a small town up north and I called the school. The secretary said "come on over, I'll show you around," so I came in. She said "We have two grade one teachers, Mrs. C and Mr. T." I said "you have a man?" She said "he's wonderful, you'll love him, he's really good". (Peggy, taped conversation, Sept 24, 1999)

I noticed the emotions in the room, perhaps because I was in a position to observe. I was able to sit at the side of the classroom while he taught, watching. When I sat at the table helping, I listened.

I wonder what happens to all the passions that children express as we grow up. I wonder why schools need to banish these expressions of passion in the pursuit of education. As an adult learner I discovered that when I engage my passions, I learn. In my experiences as a teacher, as well as a student, I know that the "educational process involves an emotionally suffused link between human beings" (Barreca and Morse, 1997, p.vii), but this link can be dangerous for male teachers of students all ages. Mandy's story revealed the dangers, when the link needed a door, and Teddy's funeral revealed the possibilities for close connections.

While conducting this research, I heard people talk about passion for learning, and our passion for teaching. Barreca and Morse (1997) state that "acts of learning and teaching are acts of desire and passion" (p. viii). By engaging my creative side in these journals, by looking at the visual representations of my world, I feel passionate about living this research story. By registering in a Ph.D. program I desire knowledge, success

and recognition. I wonder how this passion for learning is connected to the passion we feel for other people. Teachers are expected to "care", to be "passionate" about their work, to "show compassion", and as a principal once said to me, "the bottom line is, does (she/he) like children?". Barreca and Morse (1997) remind me that the "passion for learning encompasses a range of feelings and experiences, central to which, quite often, is an extraordinary relationship between the possessor of seemingly arcane knowledge and the one who yearns to possess this seeming wisdom" (p. vii).

In our culture, Valentine's Day is about love, desire and passion. It is not about the mind. There is no doubt, when walking in a suburban mall just before Valentine's Day, observing the store manikins, the posters, the chocolate shop displays, what the day is about. On that day we celebrate our bodies, and at the same time, celebrate the relationships that are important in our lives. Valentine's Day reminds us that our sexual bodies exist.

In schools, we invoke Valentine's Day in order to allow children a time to celebrate friends. In school, we disembody Valentines – we take the bodies out of it. The cards children exchange feature animals, cartoon characters or characters from the popular media. And the messages are usually bland, such as "URGR8", "Hip Hip Hooray for Valentine's Day" and "You've rescued my heart".

A week before Valentine's I asked a group working at their table, why hearts are red. I did not tape this moment, but my field notes captured some of their comments. I was

"Hearts are red because when Jesus was born, his was red."
"If God's heart started out red that means human hearts are red."
"It matches your heart inside."
When you open your heart, you let your love out."
"Jesus died for us."

Field notes, February 8, 2000

surprised that the remarks touched so quickly on theological ideas.

Perhaps combining Valentine's Day with elementary school, inadvertently calls up all that is important, and contradictory, about learning, relationships, passions and bodies. We hope our children love school, and we are glad when they tell us they love their teacher. Teachers and parents accept the love expressed in children's cards as the "right kind of love". Teachers say they "love children", but there are limits placed on the expression of this love. Peter, however, could not say that he loved Ellen. Expressions of love like that are forbidden. I heard over and over again that male teachers act as male role models, while living a kind of neutered existence. Making a friendship salad is safe.

Valentine's Day at school reveals the presence of these contradictory issues in classrooms, which add to the complexity of classroom life. Working in elementary classrooms, teachers are called to "care" but also, to be on guard. Male teachers must always be on guard.

Weber and Mitchell (1995) write about "Romancing" the school, using the upper case 'R' to evoke "the conventions of the Romantic movement in poetry and literature" (p. 72), which includes notions such as childhood innocence, and the belief that children are pure, closer to nature and natural. Much of what I heard about the special school could be classed as Romantic.

Perhaps the tradition of Valentine cards in school is closely connected to a Romantic view of childhood, while making use of romantic images of love and desire. This helps reveal the multiple sides of love, caring and desire. This shows the separation of the spiritual "pure" side and physical side of human living.

Weber and Mitchell analyze images of teaching in cultural texts, such as novels and movies, and note that what has "characterized this analysis of the primary texts of schooling and the texts of cultural production, is the degree to which these texts heroize and romanticize teachers" (p. 93). Movies are full of images of teachers as heroes who often stand alone and apart from regular, anti-hero teachers.

This thought causes me to pause. Perhaps, my naming of Peter as a superhero merely follows a typical pattern in cultural texts of teaching. Perhaps this view is too limiting, or perhaps this view is trite. However, by naming him a superhero, I hope this succeeds where the movies and novels fail. I hope this demonstrates that the teacher is NOT a superhero, and is limited by this portrayal of him by others.

Finally, this look at messages held within the Valentines is dangerous for me as author of these texts. After all, mention "eros, pleasure, desire or love as potentially pedagogical in relation to teaching, and suddenly you're on shaky ground and subject to suspicion," state Mitchell and Weber, (1995, p.128). I moved cautiously through this text in order to protect myself from accusations. After all, some might ask, how could I take a nice study about a pleasant man and turn it into sex? I might be accused of being deviant myself. I too, am an elementary teacher working in classrooms with young people. I, too, might be suspect.

However, the children in this grade one classroom showed me that eros is there, below the surface, and that in daily life it is not mentioned. When the secretary said "he's wonderful, you'll love him," she showed me that women can talk more openly about love than men. While she meant Romantic love, the right kind of love, a man would rarely say "He's a good teacher, you'll love him," to another man. Indeed, I wondered, at first,

whether Peggy, the attractive single mother, was "in love with" Peter. After all, she told me, "I just love him, I'll tell you lots of good things." If Peter said of Peggy "I love her," he would invite suspicion.

The objects of his romantic desire must not be men, women or children. He can only love his wife. At school, he must only express disembodied desires, such as the desire to see his students learn to read. He can desire their success. He can feel pleasure when they enjoy the insects in the classroom. He can love being a teacher.

Identities have histories

Identities, state Clandinin and Connelly (1999), "have histories. They are narrative constructions that take shape as life unfolds and that may, as narrative constructions are wont to do, solidify into a fixed identity … or they may continue to grow and change" (p.95). Peter's story showed me how identities grow and change. The events of this Valentine's Day showed me how knowledge, context and identity are linked. His knowledge about insects, developing because he was a grade one teacher, became part of his identity as an expert. Once Teddy died, this knowledge became part of the story of Valentine's Day, and as a result, he was able to fulfil expectations that he demonstrate caring.

When Peter was storied by others as "father figure" or "male role model", these constructions seemed to solidify into a fixed identity. Yet, Peter's experience, as revealed in his stories about Valentine's Day, indicated that his multiple identities were complex, and continued to grow and change. Between Mandy's door and Teddy's circle, I saw that different "facets, different identities, can show up, be reshaped and take on new life"

(Clandinin and Connelly, 1999, p. 95). Maleness shaped his experience every moment of every day. While at one moment he stayed on the other side of a door, another moment he brought the children together in a circle.

His own childhood history continued to influence his teaching today. Receiving two cards, and being bullied by classmates, contributed to his view that Valentine's Day should not exclude anyone.

Clandinin and Connelly (1998) state that narrative inquiry moves backward and forward, through past, present and future. Peter's story of his childhood Valentine's Day experiences showed me that his past was still very present in his life. It is almost as if he carried a shadow of his past selves with him in his present life. In mysterious ways he continued to be the little boy who received only two cards. It seems to me that this carrying of our past selves must become increasingly complex as we age. There are more stories lived and told, relived and retold.

Greene (1995) says that post modernism "thinks of persons in pursuit of themselves, and, it is hoped, of possibilities for themselves" (p. 41). By choosing to teach young children, Peter was seeking possibilities for himself. He wished to work with children, to live out his values at work and at home, to be an effective teacher, to help children learn to read and write, to open doors in their future. He did not wish to be constructed by others in ways that limited his possibilities. He hoped to be known as a "good teacher," and not necessarily as a "good male teacher." But he also wanted to be known as a "good man," and so the intersection of these identities was experienced as contradictions. On Valentine's Day, he experienced many of these contradictions.

Part Three: Responding to the Fifth Collage

9. The Night before the Opening: Peter and Garry look back

The Fifth Collage is complete. The work is hanging in the gallery ready for opening night. Peter and I stand here in the empty gallery looking at the collage, and stop for a few moments to reflect. Before the work is presented to the public, we respond to the Fifth Collage, and draw together some thoughts on the research process of the past three years. On the night before the opening, Peter and I have a conversation about the experience.

This brings this study to a close. I have created a collage, a research text. What have Peter and I figured out? What have we learned? Now that I have returned to an elementary school as an assistant principal, how has this influenced my work? To view this research as a collage invites reflection, and I notice ways the pieces overlap, connect and create different perspectives. In chapter 9, Peter and I reflect on the process of creating the work, and in chapter 10, I situate myself in the month of June 2001, looking ahead.

I sent Peter an early draft, in January 2001, which he read immediately. We met in a local coffee shop on February 6 to discuss the draft. I recorded the conversation.

Garry: When I asked you in January to read this draft I expected it to take you a couple of months, but you read it instantly and...

Peter: I couldn't put it down, I couldn't put it down.

Garry: I was so surprised when you called because you might not have read it.

Peter: It's personal to me, because it is about me, it is personal to me. I thoroughly enjoyed reading it.

As soon as we sat down, he gave me a copy of a poem entitled "Closing Arguments", which he wrote when he read the draft. He told me that he was moved by my words, by the ways I described his life. In fact, he was so moved that he wanted to express his thoughts in poetry. He hoped I would print his poem here, to bring his voice into this document.

Closing Arguments

I am a male. I am an elementary school teacher. NO, I DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM.
Like a defendant in trial, these are my closing arguments.

I hear the voices clearly.
"My child needs a man, a good role model, someone who will show them that a man can be:
caring
loving
supporting
empathetic..."

Tell me. How do I do that?

When a child is crying, I'm told that a hug is inappropriate.
When they have feelings of low self worth, I'm told that
"I love you, or I really care for you" is taboo.
When a child hugs me in appreciation, I'm told to keep my arms to myself.
When a child is struggling with difficult issues, I'm told not to get personal.

Tell me. How do I be what you need me to be?

I hear the voices clearly.
"I am so glad my child has a male teacher. He will keep the children in line.
We need someone to be:
firm
strict
unwavering
commanding of respect
tough."

Tell me. How do I do that?

When a child is hurting others, I'm told to remain calm.
When a child needs to settle down,
I'm told not to put a restraining hand on their shoulder.
When a child is pushing the limits,
I'm told to be careful lest a firm voice be misconstrued.

Tell me. How do I be what you need me to be?
We are worn by circumstances, little by little, becoming people we may not choose to be.

Like a big hairy spider I feel like a curiosity, appreciated from a distance,
largely misunderstood.

I am a parent of three lovely girls.

When they are sad, give them a hug.
When they don't feel appreciated, tell them you love them.
When they are struggling, share your struggles to encourage them.
When they are hurtful or pushing the limits, let them know that you are angry
before you blow your top.

Please treat them with empathy; caring, love, and support.
Do not be distant, aloof, impersonal, lacking in passion, like a robot.

I want to be real, not an ideal.
I am a human with real emotion, not a carefully programmed machine.
We teach kids about appropriate touches and yet we are scared to touch them for fear
that our touches may not be viewed as appropriate.

Give me the freedom to be the way you want me to be, and the trust that I will not
overstep my limits.

At the end of the day, I lay my head on my pillow
and with a deep sense of humility realize that many things are out of my control.

There, but for the grace of God, go I.

This poem powerfully represents many of the themes we discussed over the year. In a few words, he pointed to most of the ideas I struggled with while I wrote this.

He repeats two questions: "How do I do that?" and "How do I be what you need me to be?" which are really the questions that have guided this research. In Clandinin and Connelly's (1999) words, teachers "seemed more concerned to ask questions of who they are than what they know" (p. 3). Rather than "Who am I?", Peter found himself asking "Who do you want me to be?", which demonstrates fundamental connections between inward and outward experiences of life. Clandinin and Connelly (1998) state that personal experience methods are focused in four directions: inward, outward, backward and forward. They state that the inward focus refers to "the internal conditions of feeling, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral dispositions and so on", and that the outward focus refers to "external conditions, that is, the environment..." (p. 158). This document represents his internal conditions and the impact of context on his shaping. Peter's questions demonstrate that he recognizes the expectations others placed on him. In this study, these expectations often conflicted.

When he wrote "NO, I DON'T HAVE A PROBLEM," he expressed his fears. He felt like a defendant at a trial. During our conversation, I asked him why he experiences these fears. After all, no one ever said negative things to his face.

Garry: Why would you, as a male teacher, think that people say some of those negative things? I have had nothing but positive feedback from everyone I have ever worked with, no one had ever said anything negative to me. No one ever says. So how do we get those impressions?

Peter: They talked about that in university, they were talking about being appropriate and being careful about touching, don't overstep your boundaries. You get the message. Once that message is in your mind, it doesn't go away, you can't get rid of it, you can't forget about it. No one says 'if you are tall, be careful because you might scare the

children.' No one says they are in danger because you are too tall. But when you are a man...

Garry: There are opposing messages in this. One is that people want more men to work with children. Then the other is people are worried about having men that close to children. And male teachers are afraid of false accusations. A subtext in all of this is fear. Is fear one of the biggest things for men teachers that is different from women teachers?

Peter: I always said if I become fearful, then I shouldn't teach, I don't want to live my life that way, I would rather do something without the risk and not be fearful. Maybe, most males don't think about it. I am much more aware of it now because I have done this with you and read things, but I never used to be. Maybe other men go through obliviously and don't think about it ...

Garry: But in the space, in the school, no one looks at you funny, they value you, you get lots of encouragement. Yes, you have this fear of what might happen, but in the space you feel safe with the other teachers and you feel good about what you do.

Through children such Mandy and Claudette, Peter learned about taboos. He learned that others want him to be "firm, strict, unwavering, commanding of respect, tough" and at the same time he is expected to be "caring, loving supporting, empathetic...". He desired the freedom to comfort a crying child. He learned to be careful, to keep his distance. But one reason he chose to teach elementary school was because of the relationships teachers and students can share. He experienced conflict between being a friend and being a teacher.

Peter: It goes hand in hand with the whole nurturing role of teachers. You want to have this real open connection, a relationship, and sometimes you just wish you could put this professional relationship aside and just be a friend. But you have to be keep in mind that you are also a teacher.

A teacher told one of our student teachers 'You are not the kids' friend, you will not be their friend, you are the teacher, they are the students, don't forget it.' I think that is sad. The art of teaching is walking that line between being a friend and being a teacher, where you can have fun and get enthused about something and they work with you.

Garry: I guess that's what tricky, is that you do build connections, and that's this gray area we have talked about so often. I'm sure female teachers experience some of these tensions as well, but I wonder – is this a male teacher issue?

Peter: I think it is a male issue. It is not because men are necessarily different than women, but because society says men are different. Society knows that men are more likely to be pedophiles so society is more likely to be lenient with women because they seem safer. But parents want their kids in a man's classroom, I have never had a parent who did not want their child in my class. Parents want men teachers.

Even though society says men are different and likely dangerous, parents want male teachers. Peter felt valued in this school. Simultaneously, like "a big hairy spider I felt like a curiosity." Like the classroom spider in the glass container, Peter felt watched. In our conversation we talked about being watched.

Garry: But I wonder if being watched is a male teacher's experience, we are always being watched.

Peter: Males stick out, the females blend in, men can't hide. I often feel quite obvious. I feel conspicuous. I am aware of my body, I am aware that I am different. I know it and so I think others notice. Part of the feeling of being watched is because I feel that I am obvious. This is also where the superhero ties in. You can't be a superhero if you are not watched, observed.

Garry: Ya, you're right! The whole point of a superhero story is to tell us what the superhero is doing.

Peter: That sense of being watched and being the superhero is: what makes you different that you love kids and you are gentle and not like those other men? You don't really fit in, you're different, what makes you tick?

Garry: That's what I've done with this study. The other teachers, the women, are just faceless, Other Teachers, and this person, you, became this special person. Is that what it is like for kids, the women teachers just become faceless Teachers, just lots of them, and that's why you get pointed out? They notice you.

Peter: You expect to see women teachers there, and what you expect to see doesn't shock you. It's when you see the unexpected, that you feel shocked.

Garry: Part of this thing about being watched is that you watch yourself, you monitor yourself, and this connects to fear, you find yourself monitoring yourself all the time.

That's one of those things that changes over time, you watch yourself more, and that contributes to your feeling Not Real. When I think of what parents said about you, they thought you showed kids that teachers are real people. Peggy, for example, valued the relationship you had with her son.

Feeling watched is connected to fear and being "Not Real". Self-monitoring became part of his daily experience in this place. Peter was valued for showing kids that teachers are real people. The secretary noted that being real meant that he was consistent, that Peter was the same at home, as at school. Yet, in the poem, Peter indicated that at school he was an ideal, a carefully programmed machine. Hardly real. Or perhaps, like a superhero, being real means being watched. Perhaps the "Realness" of teaching is being watched and monitored.

In the poem Peter cries out to be trusted, for the "freedom to be the way you want me to be." In our conversation, he echoed these ideas. As a man, he felt others want to limit his freedom.

Peter: And you know, there's so much out there that seems to want to polarize us as males and females.

Garry: I hate that polarization.

Peter: When it comes down to it, what that does is... there's some truth in it too, but you can look at tendencies and realize there are a whole whack of people that don't fit any of those. But to say this or that, black or white, this is wrong. You start making artificial categories.

Garry: Then what we see here is that the categories become tight or constricting.

Peter: I want to demonstrate caring, support, empathy, a hug... but if I am seen more as male because I am scared to do it. I seem more male, even if that's not who I want to be.

Garry: If I was going to write concluding thoughts, or what I have been thinking about, I think I would capture that idea that we need to be more open about how we view men and women, and for masculinity to be defined in a really thick way instead of a really thin way. That's what we are trying to do. And we are finding that in this institution that

values us and cares for us, we are still pushed into narrower ways of behaving. I think people would be surprised...

Peter: People polarize males and females, it doesn't have to be that way. Some days I'm more male than other days, some days I'm more female. And that's okay. It's dynamic, it's shifting. Trying to pin down something that is dynamic, you create something that is artificial, you cannot say this is the answer, it becomes static.

Peter does not want to be different or a superhero. The public place seemed to create him.

Peter: I was thinking about the public/private thing. I really feel I wear two hats, and when I pull into the driveway I change my hat. Maybe it's the different environment, I don't feel I'm a different person at school, but I act differently. At home, where you have people who care about you, you can say what bothers you, you can let your hair down so to speak, I guess you see different behaviours. For the most part I guess I'm true to who I am at school, but I always have my public face on, they see a polished image.

Perhaps being real means wearing a public face, displaying a polished image. At the end of the day, he returned home and wondered about the "many things that are out of my control." Even in the privacy of the classroom, Peter felt that he is in control of very little. He cannot even control his own public face. This is what it means to be shaped.

Originally, I said that this study would be about a male elementary teacher and the shaping of his identity. I asked Peter if he thought I had written about his shaping.

Garry: I wonder if I included enough about shaping. Did I write about your shaping?

Peter: I think those central stories, really are the themes that shape us as males. First of all the superhero thing, those are the voices saying this is what we expect of you, that is tremendously shaping. Secondly the sexual issues shape us, the touching thing, when that's not really who I want to be. I don't want to live in fear. That's why I wrote in the poem "there but for the grace of God go I". I'm not going to be ruled by fear.

Garry: Being different shapes us too. Maybe that's one of the surprises when you are a new teacher, that everyone tells you how different you are from other men. That's one of those things that shapes you.

Peter: I was sitting in the staff room reading this draft, and teachers were asking what I was reading. They asked when you are going to come to talk about this research. They would like to know. I won't have anything to hide from the staff and so I would be okay with that. The stories I think it would good for them to know.

I'm glad you had a chance to meet with me. Once I read it I wanted to talk to someone and had no one to talk to. That's why I called you right away so we could talk. I feel privileged that you chose me to be in your study.

"There but for the grace of God, go I."

10. June 2001: Garry looks ahead to possible collages

On the first page of this dissertation I wrote about boarding the bus to Edmonton each week when I began my doctoral studies. Now, as I write this almost three years later, I am back to my predictable routines. Each day I drive my car through the morning rush hour traffic to my school on the edge of the inner city. After a two-year rest, a true sabbatical, I returned with enthusiasm. In June of the 2000-2001 school year, I love being back in a school with elementary children.

During my first days back to school in August 2000, I noticed the number of women colleagues. I saw that two of the teachers brought their children to school with them as they set up their classrooms, and thought about the fact that their husbands did not take the kids to work! These observations are examples of how this study influenced my perspective. I now notice gender everyday.

When I taped conversations with staff and parents about Peter, I met with five men and thirty-five women. I am now in a school with three men teachers and twenty-seven women staff members. If present trends continue, there will be fewer men in elementary schools. By the time I retire, there may be almost no young male teachers. If it is true that men like Peter are valued as good role models, then are three men on a staff enough? Will one "good man" do it? I think Peter's story shows that one man will not do, because the expectations are too great with too many contradictions. I wonder if, rather than asking how we might encourage more men to enter teaching, educators could ask why so many White middle class girls become teachers. Educators could ask what it is like for boys and girls, when there are no men present in their lives. Many children have said to me that their grade six teacher was the first man teacher they ever had. Is this

important? Or perhaps it is unimportant. Simply, "so what?" There is an assumption that male teachers understand boys, but I found no evidence to prove that boys experience higher achievement in a man's classroom. Perhaps educators could wonder if there are teaching practices that are good for boys, or equally good for boys and girls?

Once I began teaching in the fall, I noticed the comments.

Comments about my maleness arose unsolicited, from staff, parents and students. Because of my ongoing interest in this topic, I have recorded some of the comments in my journal.

While teaching in the grade five and six class one afternoon, a girl told me "You are the first boy-principal we've had in this school." She went on to list the previous principals and assistant principals, all women. Her own teacher is a man.

"Do you like having boy teachers?" I asked her, anxious to continue the conversation. "Yes, boy teachers are always cool," she answered. Another girl heard us and responded, "Only girl teachers should teach elementary because they know how to work with kids."

I asked the others at the table why more men do not become teachers. The answer was immediate and clearly agreed upon by the six around the table. "Because men don't like kids." Then one of them added "…except some men, like you." Again, I am perceived as different from other men.

Another child asked "if men don't like kids, why do they have kids?"

No one could really answer this, although one child listed the children her step-dad likes: herself, and her half-sister who is his daughter.

If this is their perception of men, no wonder the children enjoy male teachers so much! Are we truly the only men in their lives who like kids? In my present school, there is no story of previous men, so I do not need to be different from the previous men. However, I constantly hear, from staff members and students, that I am different from the students' fathers, and from typical men. I constantly hear statements like, "It's so nice to have another man in this school."

We all notice gender. Yet I have learned that we are aware and unaware at the same time.

I am looking for ways to keep my academic interests alive while engaged in the work of an elementary school assistant principal. I continue to keep my journals, in student exercise books. I continue to develop the collages, with the interplay of text, photographs, artwork, articles. As an assistant principal, I have an opportunity to live new stories on the landscape, to practice "narrative thinking" as we engage in the life of school, so I write about the kids, articles I read and conversations with the principal. I show these entries to the students in my writing groups, as my introduction to myself as a writer. I show them to staff members occasionally. My fascination with the stories of school life is enhanced as a result of working with Jean and the other graduate students. I believe that I notice more. I often say to others, "But look what we can learn from this!"

While writing this dissertation, I remembered my early experiences as a teacher. I reflected on my stories as a kindergarten teacher. I was encouraged by some to pursue administration but questioned this decision in my life. I felt that I was abandoning kids,

since I value the work of classroom teaching so highly. How could I leave it? In addition, I struggled with being a man in a world of women and children, feeling that everyone will assume I became an administrator because I am a man, and that it was easy for me. In addition, I was afraid I would feel like a rooster in a hen house, a father figure to all the women.

However, to think about this narratively means that I live, tell, relive and retell my own story within these contexts. I do not live out the stories of others. I can only live mine. I returned to my school system as an assistant principal, and now feel completely comfortable in the role. I love the school and this is now the story I live. I seemed to be "ready" for school administration and have "figured out" who I am in this place.

Kimmel and Messner (1989) tell us that "our identity as men is developed through a complex process of interaction with the culture in which we both learn the gender scripts appropriate to our culture and attempt to modify those scripts to make them more palatable" (p. 10). I believe that I have modified the scripts since I began teaching in the day care, and continue to do so as a male assistant principal. They go on say that "the experience of masculinity is not uniform and universally generalizable to all men in our society" (p.10). To me this means that there are many ways in our society to be a man. When Peter was described as different from other men, the reality is, all men are different from other men. Furthermore, Peter showed me that even within one man's life, the experience of masculinity changes from moment to moment, with the context and the relationships. As Peter said "it's dynamic, it's shifting" (taped conversation, Feb 6, 2001).

Kimmel (2000), in an article about women entering formerly male only military institutes, suggested that institutes have a gender. What's more, the "gender of institutions does more to shape the behaviors of the people in them than the gendered identities of individuals who populate them" (p. 512).

Because I was writing this, and simultaneously working in an elementary school, this statement seemed like an important key for me. Rather than seeing the institution of elementary schools as gendered, I see that the narrative of elementary schools as gendered. The institutional narrative is female in many ways. Perhaps this helps explain the complexities and contradictions observed in Peter Thompson's life, and lived in my life. But what is important about the idea of institutional gender, is that "the notion that any individual can accomplish what he or she wants to, and ought not be handicapped by gender stereotypes, ignores the way in which these actors act in gendered institutions" (p. 512). This makes me realize that everyday of my working life, since the day I started work in that day care centre during the summer, I have been acting within an institutional narrative that told me I was male. This shaped who I am, just as it shaped Peter.

But are institutions soul-less entities? Or places in which people live out their storied lives? Every time someone made a statement prefaced with "society says…", I wondered who exactly, speaks for "society". In writing this dissertation I attempted to describe ways in which the people become the institution. Society are us.

It is only in the context of equality, Kimmel concludes, that "the assumed differences between men and women will be revealed as stereotypes that help neither women nor men nor the institutions in which we find ourselves. We are neither Martians or Venutians but Earthlings" (p. 514).

As I think about this study, I see that the differences between men and women that teachers and parents referred to, were *assumed differences.* Furthermore, these assumed differences were usually expressed as stereotypes, (for example, men with a feminine side like ballet). Back in school, I continue to hear these gender differences expressed as stereotypes. I believe that these stereotypes do not help teachers or children because stereotypes place us in boxes. Boxes restrict our movements. I learned how Peter was constrained by stereotypes. Now that I am back in school, I wonder how children experience the stereotypes. How does their shaping as boys and girls occur? Do boys and girls live cover stories? I see the grade six girl who loves to play soccer with the boys, or the grade five boy who loves clothes, earrings and ever changing hair colors. I wonder how they experience gender stereotypes.

When I returned to the school system, I decided that I would like to meet regularly with other male teachers to continue the conversations. This would help me keep the academic research interest alive and push my thinking along. I called five colleagues and asked them to meet with me to discuss possibilities. We met in my living room in June 2000, and greatly enjoyed our conversation. We decided to continue to meet and see what happened.

During the 2000-2001 school year, we met monthly, shared and discussed articles and had fun. We have enjoyed the friendship of men, and have started to read the recent books about boys (Pollack, 1998; Kindlon and Thompson, 1999). Much of our discussion revolves around boys in school. For me, the men's group pushes this research along and for the first time in my life, I am developing a group of male teaching friends.

A recent conversation showed me that little has changed. One of the men said he was told that others thought about joining the group, but they were afraid it was a bunch of gay guys. I realized, with some shock, that men getting together to discuss men and boys, is threatening. If this group met to play golf, no one would wonder about our intentions. In addition, this comment warns others away from the group, as if we have nothing useful to add to the debate. Finally, even if we were gay, does this mean we have nothing useful to say about boys and their educational experiences? Again, I saw that sexuality, and fears of homosexuality, are just below the surface of social life.

In school, children meet mostly women teachers, and so the lone male teacher takes on a strong identity. All the others are "just teachers". Thus, nearly all male teachers become superheroes, and women teachers take on a collective personality.

I still think the absence of men is a social justice issue, but did not explore this in this research. While Peter's dedication to teaching was clear, in his career choice he is different from the majority of other men. I am beginning to think the absence of men shows us that children are not valued in our culture. If children represent, literally as well as metaphorically, the future, then perhaps the future is not valued. Perhaps our lack of interest in raising our children shows us that we are truly living for today.

Blount (2000) writes that "American public education remains a profoundly gender-polarized profession" … "due not only to deep-rooted sexism but also to in part to a generalized fear of homosexuality…" (p. 97). In our patriarchal society, it seems to me, if children were highly valued, men would be present. The high numbers of women present in day care centers and elementary schools, demonstrate that child care is not

important, and that women look after children. I wonder, then, if we can ever have gender equity, when most children in our society continue to be raised by women.

While the presence of one or two men makes them visible inside the context of the school, in general, men are absent. They are "out there", in the "real world". This absence makes men invisible. Like Kuzmic's (2000) study of history textbooks, it is this invisibility that perpetuates messages that mask patriarchy (p. 112). After all, schools demonstrate on a daily basis that child care is women's work. The women teachers, by their very presence, demonstrate that child care is women's work. As the story of Mandy's wet pants demonstrated, women take over the personal care of a child. The man automatically moved to a privileged position, as one who did not need to "dirty his hands" with domestic work.

This study of Peter Thompson has helped me to look at teachers, children and schools from new perspectives. While I began with a study into male teachers, rooted in my own experiences as a male teacher, I have been able to see that everything in schools connects in complex ways. Gender is one aspect of social life. I have seen that all men are different than other men, and our experiences of masculinity change over time, place and across relationships. I look forward to continuing this research interest in how men and boys, women and girls, are storied in schools. I seek those moments when we are more similar than different, and reveal the assumed differences that are stereotypes. I certainly notice gender issues when they arise in my daily life.

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